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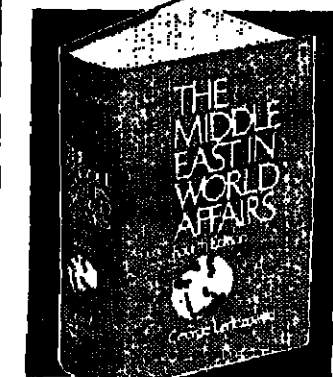
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SEPTEMBER 4 1981

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## On pain of retribution

By Richard Gombrich

WENDY DONIGER O'FLAHERTY  
(Editor):  
Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions  
342pp. University of California Press. £16.50.  
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In her sprightly introduction, Wendy O'Flaherty calls this book "all you wanted to know about karma and never dared (bothered?) to ask." It is a major contribution to Indology, but not an easy introduction to the subject. It results from two conferences on karma organized for scholars working in America by Karl Potter, though of the twelve contributors only he, the editor and P. S. Jaini attended both conferences, and three attended neither. All twelve articles are extremely informative. Lest it escape attention, being near the end of the book and formidably footnoted, let me single out the chapter by Wilhelm Halbfass, who in covering a wide range of the intellectual problems which the karma theory set for philosophers has selected extremely interesting material. Moreover, even though his article is hardly for non-specialists, its introduction offers the nearest thing to a general historical introduction to the subject in the book, and so is a good place to begin. To get a clear account of the main theory one should then turn to Professor Potter's article. For all its interest the editor's chapter, since it deals with exceptions to that theory, is not well placed at the beginning of the book.

The chapters range in clarity from the superbly lucid papers by Potter and Jaini to that by William Stabilein on "The Medical Soteriology of Karma in Buddhist Tantra", which I might have found easier in the original Tibetan. (I do not know Tibetan.) The predilection which the editor shares with Stabilein for "the methodology of oppositions" pushes part of her contribution close to his on the obfuscation index.

The book aims to show that the Indian theory of karma and rebirth is no simple unity. In this it succeeds — perhaps too well, for there is no contribution which adequately locates the wood before we begin to examine the trees. Thus the reviewer

must rush in where the contributors have learnt not to tread, and rashly hazard a summary. Karma is a theory of cosmic justice — a statement too bald to appear in this book. The theory deals with the whole problem area of causation in human affairs, and hence with moral responsibility, free will and apparently undeserved suffering; it thus concerns the nature of God (if any), the soul (if any) and what happens after death. The theory holds that all intentional acts (and sometimes others too) are good or bad, and entail correspondingly pleasant or painful results for the agent. Evidently people do not always get their deserts in this life; but the theory posits rebirth in an endless series of states which range from heavens through various conditions on earth (from Brahmin to bug or lower) down to hells. As Potter says, the theory "is not in principle untestable, though in practice it is because of technical difficulties".

I suppose that in this crucial area of concern all societies harbour a wide range of ideas, some of them logically incompatible, and that individuals tend to choose those ideas which answer to the needs of the moment. Examples from our own society abound: just now there is fierce controversy about assigning responsibility for looting shops to the police, to "society", to television, to "false consciousness", etc. Wise words on karma were written by David Pocock in *Mind, Body and Wealth*.

Re-birth is primarily for other people. Just as few Westerners accept fully the finiteness of their own existence, so that death tends to be thought of as something that happens to others, so the Gujarati peasants when they speak of themselves as individuals conceive of a hell or some sort of heaven. It is when they speak of others, when they are looking for some view of theory to explain the misfortune of others, that they have recourse to the theory of re-birth. Certainly they do not deny salvation to others, equally they apply the re-birth theory to their own occasional griefs but primarily the emphases are as I have described

... The belief in some kind of eternal salvation relates to the future whereas the belief in re-birth relates to the past.

Thus the two aspects of karma, the active ("do as you would be done by") and the passive ("be done by as you did") have different uses and resonances. Since the theory is that the universe is ultimately just, it makes no sense unless the retribution comes to the original agent. In myth, ritual and popular parlance there are plenty of exceptions stated or inferable, but these can be satisfactorily interpreted as efforts to temper justice with mercy, mostly by using older ideas which have survived in the culture precisely because they are useful for that purpose. To speak, as Gerald Larson does in his eccentric coda to the book, of "the apparent anomaly between what might be called the 'transference of karma interpretation' and the 'non-transference of karma interpretation'" is to make awfully heavy weather of these inconsistencies.

In the oldest Indian texts, the Vedas and Brahmanas (c. 1500 - c. 700 BC), the dead normally go to heaven; there is no karma theory, but an ancestor in the next world may die again unless fed by his living descendants. The ancient funeral and commemorative rites, which centre on ancestor worship, still survive in Hindu practice, though based on conceptions incompatible with karma doctrine. Though the Sanskrit word *karma* means "act" in general, in a religious context it primarily meant a significant act, i.e. a ritual enjoined by the Veda. He who performed all prescribed acts could expect to join his ancestors in heaven.

As Obeyesekere's article reminds us, belief in rebirth is widespread among Indian tribes — as indeed elsewhere — and may well have joined the ideological mainstream from a tribal source. Combining the idea of continual rebirth with the Brahminical doctrine of the necessary efficacy of prescribed acts (and ill effects of their omission or contraries) produced the classical karma doctrine. That doctrine first appears, unsystematically, in Brahminical texts of about the seventh century BC. Obeyesekere argues that the karma eschatology is just the logical result

of ethicizing the rebirth eschatology, but I disagree for two reasons. Firstly, the karma doctrine appears with the idea that it is best to escape rebirth altogether; worldly merit will be rewarded, but that is far inferior to getting out of the whole system; indeed, most schools regard even meritorious acts as a positive hindrance to salvation. I cannot see that this is a logical corollary of the karma doctrine or of ethicization, and adhere to the older view that a profound malaise arising from social change must have occasioned this wish to leave the world. Secondly, Obeyesekere himself shows that the Hindu version of the karma theory is not completely ethicized; far from it: failing to perform certain daily rites is as great a "sin" for a Hindu as, e.g. cruelty.

Full ethicization took place in Buddhism and Jainism. Both these religions arose in the sixth century BC as protest movements, denying the authority of the Veda and hence the efficacy of ritual. So for them karma was purely a matter of morality. Jainism is the religion which has paid the most attention to karma, devoting vast works to its description and classification. A Jain is so keen to attain salvation by abstaining from all action that his ideal end is self-starvation. For Jains eating involves murder, for they are hylolistic and attribute both life and moral agency to everything. Hindus, with rare exceptions, endow plants with souls; Buddhists do not, stopping short at what we too would consider animate objects (including spirits).

All the early thinkers, whether Jain, Buddhist or Hindu, saw the operation of karma as automatic, a law of nature. So how does it work? The Jains hold karma to be a kind of dust which sticks to the soul. Buddhists and early Hindu philosophers admirably expounded here by McDermott, Potter and Halbfass, answered in terms of dispositions. Since Buddhists deny the existence of a soul, their emphasis is on a causal sequence of moral events. The next question is what gets reborn. Having denied the potential vehicle for karmic residues, the Buddhists post a continuum of moments of consciousness, each determined by the last; the last conscious moment

of life in one organism determines the first in an embryo or non-mammalian form of life. Jains again have the most straightforward solution: the soul is coterminous with the body and is adaptable in extent like a foldable cloth. Their only problem is to get the soul from one body to the next; in an appendix to Jaini's article a Jain agronomist suggests that it may be done by radio waves or by pheromones, the chemicals by the smell of which ants and bees communicate. Hindus have the problem that their scriptures hold the soul to be omnipresent. Most schools postulate a "subtle body" — a ghostly alter ego which fills from life to life and serves as the link between the soul and its phenomenal experiences.

This variety led to correspondingly varied theories of conception, and to the postulation or denial of states intermediate between one life and the next. The pure monists had the problem that they claimed to be merely expounding the statements in the late Vedic scriptures, which are not consistent; this led them (notably Sankara in the seventh century) to a complicated scheme of rebirth in which the link between action and result was guaranteed only by God. But by that time Hindu theism had in any case destroyed the logical cohesion of the karma theory.

Though *prima facie* every act has its consequence, all theorists saw that this raises problems. How is there time for every act to bear fruit? And if every detail of one's life is karmically determined, is there room for the free will necessary to generate fresh karma? The general view was that some karmic consequences are stronger than others and that karma determines only certain parameters of one's next life, chiefly station at birth and length of natural life-span, plus special cases of pleasure and pain for which common sense offers no convincing explanation. Mitchell Weiss writes on karma in a medical text: a disease may be cured by "human effort", but if it resists established remedies the patient's bad karma is evidently too strong. This text, like many others, identifies what men call fate with past karma, the passive aspect, and argues for the active corollary, human effort. The argument with fatal-

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ism has probably never ceased to be a live issue in Hindu culture. Bruce Long's article on the great epic, the *Mahabharata*, shows that characters in it often argue for fatalism in both theistic and atheistic forms and ascribe all responsibility variously to fate, time, death, an "Arranger", etc.

Must every act produce a result? Naturally people want to evade unpleasant consequences. Most forms of karma theory allow acts somehow to be cancelled out. Vedic ritualism already had atonement for faults. These ritual expiations (which Potter is wrong to say apply only to omens) are still important. The classical Hindu lawbooks which Ludo Rocher discusses devote much space to them and debate whether they apply to intentional or unintentional faults or both - which clearly shows that in some contexts a bad act (karma) is an "offence" rather than a "sin". Other ways of cancelling out bad acts mentioned in various sources are confession, remorse, and such good acts as Vedic study.

This is all piecemeal counteraction; but there is also a whole way of life devoted to negating one's karma. It is undertaken by the person - Hindu, Buddhist or Jain - who wishes to escape rebirth. He leaves society and formally renounces all his worldly obligations to lead a life of withdrawal, "burning out" past karma and creating no new karma by ever acting with a selfish motive. Jains and most Hindus believed that all one's former actions, good as well as bad, had to be systematically negated by meditation and austerities. Buddhists and other Hindus thought that by gaining salvific knowledge one might short-circuit the system and escape the results of all but the most heinous crimes. Hindus in the pure monistic tradition aim to realize that the world and its acts are illusory anyway, so that karma is made inoperative by gnosis; as we might say to a ghost, "I refuse to be scared of you - you don't exist."

This last attitude is prefigured in the most famous Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita* (third century BC). But the *Gita* is theistic and prescribes a cosmology, God says that the man who wishes to escape rebirth should remain in the world and do the duties of his station, but make over the results to Him. In this second-order attitude of non-attachment lies the key to liberation (Potter). To this day sectarian Hin-

dus (monotheists) dedicate the result of every act, in particular of every rite, to God.

Of course this is illogical. It reifies karma as if the results were credits and debits in a bank account. Buddhists did the same when they institutionalized the "transfer of merit", even though punhists saved doctrinal appearances by comparing merit transfer to lighting one lamp from another: the first does not lose what is "transferred".

The Buddhist transfer of merit probably originated in the funeral rites with which Wendy O'Flaherty begins the book. Indeed, only Jains (P. S. Jaini tells us) have had the rigour to deny all transfer of merit and completely abolish Hindu-type commemorative rites for the dead. No doubt people feel an overwhelming desire to do something for a newly dead parent and need to feel that their children will be able to do something for them. This explains why karma is transferred in this context, and indeed why when karma is said to be transferred at other times it usually passes in the family line: the interdependence of ancestors and descendants is a deep-seated feeling in the culture, as in so many others. Again in a ritual context, bad karma may be transferred to officiating priests, especially at mortuary rites.

But apart from transfer in the family line and specific ritual contexts, ideas that karma can be transferred so that someone else reaps what I have sown are in Hinduism, pace O'Flaherty, very much the exception. Alleged cases must be closely scrutinized. "Group karma" may be just the coincidental karma of several individuals. McDermott's example, drawn from Buddhism, would also apply to some apparent Hindu transfers: "A fratricide could only be born of parents who because of their past karma deserved the suffering that results from the violent loss of a child, who in turn deserved to suffer such a death at the hands of his brother as a punishment for his own past deeds." Some of the myths O'Flaherty cites as instances of karma transference can be just as well explained in orthodox terms; besides, as she says, "inconsistencies result from the narrator's freedom to select whatever theory best explains the present exigencies of his plot."

To transfer good karma to one's dead father or bad karma to the funeral priest is a very different thing

from transferring it to God, for God does not experience any results. We come now to the final subversion of the karma doctrine - and to this book's main deficiency. In the second half of the first millennium AD there arose in South India a new form of Hindu devotionism which gradually permeated India. Giving one's karma to God acquired a wholly new meaning. In the *Gita* one had to earn God's grace by good works. Now that grace was declared to be arbitrary. George Hart's article on "The Theory of Reincarnation among the Tamils" captures the point. In a Tamil poem God saves a man who has slept with his mother and murdered his brahmin father. The world of transmigration "is conceived not as an intricate mechanism for the recompense of one's acts, but rather as a nightmarish condition from which the only release is God. Nor can God be bought by action or even devotion. He acts in inscrutable ways... His grace is freely given."

Unfortunately Hart's article is not integrated with the rest of the book. (He was not at the conferences.) The theologian Ramanuja (eleventh century) brought this attitude into the mainstream of Hinduism and it is now the dominant religion of India. No one in this book asks the question, crucial for Indian thinking, just what is meant by being the agent of an act. Every Indian who learnt Sanskrit, the language of our sources, did so from Panini's grammar, which defines the agent as independent. In the earlier period of Hindu theism the soul is ultimately identical with God, at least in most respects, so that the individual can be a true agent: his agency and God's coincide, to the derogation of neither. In Ramanuja God transcends his devotees; He is master, they are slaves and own nothing. God is the only true agent. What we call "human effort" is just a form of God's power. Fatalism returns through a theistic backdoor.

The *Gita* compromise is uncommon in Hinduism today. Most Hindus either live in the world, try to do their duty, and conceive that their reward will be heaven (perhaps to be finally followed by rebirth); or they are (essentially monotheistic) sectarians who hope that God will use his power to intervene and wipe out their bad karma - which is but His will in any case - and take them to His special heaven, quite a Christian sort of place.



"The Pump 1938", a wood engraving by George Mackley. See also page 101.

## Diverging upwards

John A. T. Robinson

WILFRED CANTWELL SMITH:  
*Towards a World Theology*  
Faith and the Comparative History of Religion  
206pp. Macmillan, £15.  
0 333 27605 1

Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *Meaning and End of Religion* was a landmark in the modern study of comparative religion, questioning the validity of speaking of "religions" in the plural, like Hinduism and Buddhism, as reified entities. He is here concerned with the history and theology of "religion in the singular". Indeed he tells us that he would like to write a history of religion, century by century, rather than "faith" by "faith" (this he claims is quite a modern usage). For no centuries are religious in the same way: we share a common interconnected history, and religions evolve, he believes, by continuous creation rather than by a series of "big bangs" of discrete revelations *ad extra*. This does not in any way deny their distinctiveness, nor the transcendent reality to which they are each responding. But the challenge of the present age is that mankind should become corporately and critically self-conscious of the convergent global continuum in which we all participate whatever our medium of response. And he presents a case for comparative religion as "the humane history of man", the study of "human lives at their most intimate, most profound, most primary, most transcendent".

It is a stretching and indeed exciting thesis. Professor Cantwell Smith is strongest, as he himself admits, when he is writing as a historian rather than as a theologian, and at his most lucid when being descriptive rather than analytical. His opening chapter, for instance, in which he traces the intricate history of the Barabara and Josephat legend passing in and out of medieval Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism, or the inter-faith pedigree of the rosary or the Christmas-card argument proceeds it often seems to parenthetical and self-corrections that check the movement of the sentence, so that momentum is lost. It is not a book to read in snatches on the train: it began as lectures at Birmingham University nearly ten years ago and perhaps has suffered from too much going over. Yet it is an important book.

The title is deliberately modest - "towards a world theology" - and the process is a bit like a game of grandmother's foot-steps. One is never confident that one will get the goal without being sent back. Yet the goal is worth the pursuit. The day when we could be content with self-contained and competing Christian theologies, Islamic theologies and the rest is over. Yet a world theology must be one of which "the religions" are the subject not the object of the study, as the human community in and through all its religious sub-communities participates in the self-understanding of "the faith-history of man".

Just as within the Church ecumenical theology done by a Presbyterian (as Cantwell Smith himself is) will transcend rather than dilute his particular form of faith, so to work towards a theology of comparative religion is to respect and draw out the reality that there is "faith which saves" in many forms. It saves by delivering men and women from alienation, anomie, meaninglessness, unfreedom and the rest, by affording the courage to suffer without disintegrating, to succeed without gloating, and giving them "their sense of belonging to a community, of accepting and being accepted, their ability to trust and be trusted, to discipline themselves, to formulate ideals, to postpone reward, to work hard towards a distant goal... and so on".

The crunch question, as he ends by recognizing, is whether he does justice to the claim which has undoubtedly been a persistent part of "participating in the Christian process" (his definition of being a Christian), that in Jesus Christ there has been some uniquely saving act or revelation. He is quite honest in believing that Christians have now to learn to speak a different language: "I do not say that just like that, absolutely, imperiously, and suggest that it is not a good thing to say. I say that God has been revealed to man in Jesus Christ, and has been to many millions of people throughout history." Yet "God" is not revealed fully in Jesus Christ to me, nor indeed to anyone that I have met; or that my historical studies have uncovered. Whether one can resolve the issue, theologically as well as historically, by such a radical existentializing of the question is doubtful. Cantwell Smith remains conscious that for some "what I can offer is a not nearly Christian enough Christian's contribution. Nonetheless, I somehow thought it worth trying". It was and is.

## HISTORY OF IDEAS

GEOFFREY G. FIELD:  
*Evangelist of Race*  
The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain  
565pp. New York: Columbia University Press, \$32.50.  
0 231 04860 2

RODERICK STACKELBERG:  
*Idealism Debated*  
From Völkisch Ideology to National Socialism  
202pp. Eurospan/Kent State University Press, £10.95.  
0 87338 252 8

Every time I think I have made peace with German culture, someone comes along and publishes a book about Wagnerites. These two books, Geoffrey G. Field's *Evangelist of Race* and Roderick Stackelberg's *Idealism Debated*, are the most detailed pressings I have done for many months, not because they are incompetent but precisely because they are competent. Field's solid biography of Houston Stewart Chamberlain comes, in fact, as close to being definitive as any life can hope to be - at least I cannot imagine another scholar again ploughing through all of Chamberlain's repulsive writings or shoving again through the intellectual sewer from which he drew what we must, I suppose, call his ideas. These books are eloquent reminders that much of high German culture in the Empire or what passed for high culture - was poisoned by self-serving theories of race for which there was not a shred of respectable evidence, by self-centred fantasies of national glory that read like transcriptions of neurotic manoeuvres designed to evade feelings of inferiority or impotence, and by a self-intoxicated rhetoric of which a schoolboy in his senses would have been ashamed.

Field's biography of Houston Stewart Chamberlain is in fact a most interesting study, and a highly self-conscious piece of work. It disclaims any intentions of posing as a psycho-biography and warns, not unreasonably, against the risks that the psychoanalytically orientated biographer must take. At the same time, just as reasonably, Field finds the psychological dimensions in Chamberlain's life and work inescapable and important, and he scatters judgements that show at least a nifty acquaintance with Freud through his book. He quotes, in full, a pair of Chamberlain's anxiety dreams, in both of which Chamberlain has been captured by Jews and condemned to death by them. Then he generalizes about Chamberlain's "sense of isolation", his "knot of national estrangement", and personal anxiety which "remained entangled in his character", leading, in his adult life, to "an impassioned search for roots in Germany", and suggests that his hostility to England was also mixed with strong elements of guilt and self-doubt. Field's frequent and extensive quotations from Chamberlain's diaries, letters, and vast corpus of published writings bear out this thumb-nail diagnosis.

Houston Stewart Chamberlain was, or early grew into, the very thing he least wanted to become: a rootless cosmopolitan. He was also with his uncertain physical and mental health, the very opposite of the Nordic hero he made into his strident ideal. Men of ideas are often yoking reaction formations, denying impulses or characteristics they dare not acknowledge by moving to the other extreme. Chamberlain was a textbook example of the type, bleating for what he could never be. He was born in England in 1855; his father was an admiral and his mother had aristocratic connections. He was to reject the England that was so unmistakably his heritage. After his mother died, when he was a year old, he was turned over to his paternal grandmother and an unmarried aunt who lived in Versailles, and he soon spoke French better than English. Always a gifted linguist, he was to pick up German, and assorted

# A homeland for heroes

By Peter Gay

other languages, in later years. His schooling, back in England, was a French, and too spoilt, to fit in with his games-playing, rough-housing class-mates. Then, in 1870, he had his first glimpse of Germany; it was fateful. "From the beginning," he reminisced almost half a century later, he saw "not a phillistine Germany, not a Germany of travelling salesmen and company directors, still less a nation of unrealistic dreamers and professors, and least of all a Germany of chattering parliamentarians and weak-kneed ministers. Rather, it was a heroic Germany, establishing itself with the insuperable power of right and its knightly cadres commanded by immortal heroes." It did not take long for his Teutonic infatuation to flower: he wanted to be part of a country of men with strong knees, a land of medieval heroes, preferably immortal.

As soon as he could, Chamberlain returned to Germany to stay, converting the country of his adoption into what Field aptly describes as "an idealized homeland which he called 'Germany'". As early as the mid-1870s, when he was about twenty, his dominant life's fantasy was firmly in place. "I cannot tell you," he wrote in 1876 to Anna Horst, who was to become his wife, "how much my reverence, my passionate love for Germany and my faith in her increases. The more I learn of other nations, the more I mix with people of all classes - educated and uneducated - from all the countries of Europe, the more I love Germany and the Germans" - and so on for some pages. And he concluded: "6:45 in the evening. Ah you beloved German nation! Will you never discover your exalted role that your ordained path is not to be that of the other nations?" To this sick, potentially dangerous amalgam of wishes and fantasies, Chamberlain promptly added antisemitism. Field's book is, as he notes, essentially about antisemitism, and he supplies a malodorous bouquet of mean-spirited, paranoid, increasingly vicious remarks about Jews - their smell and their corrosiveness, their mendacity and mercantile mentality, their resemblance to vermin - large enough, and redolent enough, to last the reader a lifetime.

Diligently and patiently, Field follows Chamberlain through his long life - his discovery of Wagner, his attempts at a scientific career, his breakdowns, and his final discovery of a vocation: that of a German *Volksgeist* espousing the cause of cultural renewal as imagined, disseminated, and sold at an exorbitant price by the Bayreuthian circle around Cosima Wagner and her dutiful acolytes. Richard Wagner had died in early 1883, and his death did wonderful things for his inconsolable widow. Guilt-ridden and lachrymose about her sinful betrayal of her first husband, Hans von Bülow, and about the sufferings to which she had exposed her children, she now turned, into the authoritative keeper of Wagner's shrine and the "high priestess of his doctrine. Though, in the eyes of the faithful, a mere woman, Cosima Wagner could command the Wagnerian troops with calm confidence because everyone (some rather grudgingly) admitted that she spoke for the Master. Chamberlain earned his way into this quasi-religious cult by serving an apprenticeship among Wagnerites in Vienna, and then writing, extensively and plausibly, about the Master and his legacy. Later, after he divorced his elderly first wife, he sealed his allegiance to this Nordic faith by marrying Wagner's youngest daughter, Eva. His authenticity as a spokesman for heroic Germany was complete.

The single act of Chamberlain's life, though, that brought him international celebrity and influential followers - Emperor Wilhelm II became a fervent admirer and close friend - was not pure Wagnerism. It was, of course, his *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1899, a gliblyst of cultural anthro-

polo, biblical exegesis, racial slurs, and *Kulturgeschichte*. It was, as Roderick Stackelberg justly says, not the "work of history, philosophy, and anthropology" that Chamberlain proclaimed it to be, but "a political tract". It is the kind of book, with its vast generalizations, sweeping vistas, and portentous pronouncements, that readers like to feel they have understood, and feel good about. It seems to present insights into the dizzied consumers into an exclusive club of cultivated critics of vulgar modernity; reading about elites and their subversion, the reader may join the elite and despise the subversives. The book, as Field rightly notes, was the work of a dilettante and an autodidact: "I know nothing about history," Chamberlain wrote to Cosima Wagner, frankly enough, "nothing at all." But this did not stop him from writing, nor others from reading him. Chamberlain was a mediocre, indiscriminate, and voracious reader, skimming useful quotations from his massive consumption of the most varied fare, and happily uninhibited by critical judgment. As Geoffrey Field shows in a long and very valuable chapter on the reception of the *Foundations*, this impudent amateurishness only increased his readership. The sceptical reservations of professional historians did not dampen the ardour of Chamberlain's admirers. He told them what they wanted to hear.

After the *Foundations*, Chamberlain wrote much else, but up to his death in 1927 he remained, at least for the general public, the author of this one book. He lived long enough to witness the end of his beloved Empire, the travail of the despised Weimar Republic, and the emergence of a most interesting demagogue, Adolf Hitler. The one lesson his copious publications should have imparted was one that few people were willing to draw: a lot of learning, when yoked to ineradicable bigotry, is a dangerous thing.

Field's is a very long book. It tells us more about Houston Stewart Chamberlain than we want to know, though not what we ought to know. As a trained historian, Field carefully puts all of the man and his notions into their context. He discusses German antisemitism and its varieties, fanatical vegetarianism and its political implications, racial anthropology and its fatal heritage, that stew of rural nostalgia, anti-urbanism, racism and nationalism known by the untranslatable German word *Volksgeist*, to say nothing of Teutonic Christianity, the happy idea that Jesus was no Jew (an idea that Chamberlain championed) and perhaps even a German (a notion so far-fetched as to seem improbable even to Chamberlain). Field, then, has written a cultural history of a sordid, but potent element in German life, which is still not wholly eradicated. My only reservations are the measure of uncertainty that Field displays among his auxiliary disciplines. He seems to be willing to draw from mutually exclusive doctrines in social psychology, including Adorno's *Authoritarian Personality*, a conflation of left-wing convictions and revisionist Freudianism that has long since been discredited. Antisemitism remains something of a puzzle, and its varieties deserve to be canvassed and, perhaps, understood separately, just as we are learning to understand cancer by breaking it down into a whole spectrum of diseases: Field's use of Freud's ideas is equally tentative. It will not do simply to quote dreams and interpret them as though their manifest contents exhaust their meaning. But these are small cavils. Field's *Evangelist of Race* is, though disheartening, a very valuable book.

For those who find more than 500 closely packed pages on one man - and such a man - too daunting, Roderick Stackelberg's economical *Idealism Debated* may be the book to read. It takes the measure of three German *völkische* writers: the Wagnerian propagandist Heinrich von Stein, whose early death left the

Bayreuth headquarters sadly depleted; the novelist and playwright Friedrich Lienhard, who called for Germany's "renewal" in language, and with images, which the Nazis were to find immensely useful; and none other than Houston Stewart Chamberlain, ably summed up in fifty pages. For Stackelberg, in Germany, the worst was born from the corruption of the best - the debased ideology of the Nazis and their fellow-travellers was the distillate of an idealist collection of ideas. The best in this case, I might add, was scarcely impressive. Stackelberg, like Field, ventures into psychoanalytical explanations - the prohistory and history of Nazism seem to invite this kind of analysis with particular urgency, much to the detriment of psychoanalytic ideas, which, after all, Freud developed to explain all of the human mind, normal as well as neurotic, elevated as much as debased. "Self-styled idealists", Stackelberg notes, "failed to live up to their own avowed principles. Projecting their own egocentrism onto Jews, they either failed to realize or refused to admit that their hierarchical notions of triumphant spiritual forces were in fact self-serving." In brief, and thoughtful intellectual profiles of his three subjects, Stackelberg buttresses this case beyond much doubt.

Both Field and Stackelberg, different as their books are in intention and execution, raise an important question about German historiography. After the collapse, in 1945, of the Thousand Year Reich, young historians of Germany, disinclined to exculpate their compatriots for their crimes and unwilling to put the blame on everyone except themselves, sought earnestly for the roots of Nazism in their own past. They came up with an impressive collection of villains from Luther to Wilhelm II, with Bismarck the easy

favourite. Most notably, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, in his popular short history of the German Empire, detected ideological and structural flaws which he described as a serious, ultimately fateful legacy. Wehler, and yet, these historians are infinitely preferable to the apologists who have insisted, in that convenient German phrase of denial "Es ist nicht meine Schuld" - it is not my fault! - that they oversimplified the cultural pluralism, and underrated the liberal potential, of the decades in which first Bismarck, then Wilhelm II, were at the rudder. In my own *Freud, Jews and Other Germans*, I rather mildly criticized this school for seeing all of the German past as prologue to Hitler. But these two books under review, though cautious in their building of bridges, affirm at least some connections between the Imperial decades and the Nazi regime. "It has become almost the fashion for historians of Germany to warn against the temptation to look forward to 1933," Field writes, "claiming that the 'search for parallels and prototypes' distorts the history of the Kaiserreich." And yet, though alert to this peril, and intent on avoiding "the teleological trap", Field believes (and Stackelberg would agree with him) that "inevitably the career of Chamberlain does lead us towards the horrifying reality of the Nuremberg Laws and Auschwitz". This is persuasively put. The point of all good historical writing is, obviously, to do justice to continuities and discontinuities alike. Modern German history will remain a battleground of conflicting interpretations in large part because the respective shares of continuity and discontinuity remain so hard to assess. Field has done much and so has Stackelberg - to the way towards a reasonable balance.

## To know the unknowable

By Henry Chadwick

ANDREW LOUTH:  
*The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*  
215pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press, £12.50.  
0 19 826655 3

This is a book which needed writing, and its execution by an engaged scholar expert in Christian antiquity is most welcome. Andrew Louth writes with deep sympathy for his theme, and with a wide-ranging knowledge of the texts. He divides his work into ten chapters: three on pre-Christian antiquity; five on the principal mystical writers among the Fathers of the Church; from Origen to Denys; and then two appendices of special interest on the relation between patristic mysticism and St John of the Cross.

The preparation for the Christian tradition is introduced by preliminary discussions of Plato, Philo, and Plotinus. At the fountain-head of the stream Plato teaches that in an ecstasy transcending rationality we may know the unknowable Beauty which is also the One and the Good. He also bequeathes a sharp tension between the ideals of contemplation withdrawal and active participation in political life in the service of society. God is the sun by whose light the soul is enabled to see. The hellenized Jew, Philo of Alexandria, elder contemporary of St Paul, takes up the ecstatic language of Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Ion*, first coming the

phrase "sober intoxication" to describe the elevation of the soul to its origin in God, but insisting that the transcendent God can be known only by his own gift of grace, by a revelation enshrined in the law and the prophets. Plotinus, by contrast, has no doctrine of grace. The path to union with God is a planned withdrawal from the things of sense, to concentrate on the higher reality in space and time, and, by purifying the soul of all passions, to restore it to its true self. This is the soul's way of self-transcendence as it passes upwards into pure Mind, in a flight of the alone to the Alone.

The focus then turns to the Christians in the Bible. Origen finding his mysticism mediated through devout meditation on the text of Holy Scripture; to Athanasius' emphatic vulnerability to passing downwards to non-being; then to the surprising rejection of ecstasy and the denial of the ultimacy of contemplation found in Gregory of Nyssa, a writer profoundly influenced by Plotinus. The masters of ascetic theology following in the tradition of Origen: the very un-Origenist (but no less intelligent and sophisticated) "Macarius" of the "Messalian" movement, that is, of the "men of prayer" of late fourth-century Syria and Asia Minor, feelings of their religion of "late" trying to "revivify" it *via media* between Evagrius and Macarian elements. In an attempt to keep his mysticism orthodox (as Evagrius and "Macarius" were thought not to have, respectively).

done). Augustine and Denys the Areopagite each have a chapter to themselves: Augustine finding in the experience of grace the reality that Platonic mysticism seemed to promise without being able actually to deliver, and more soberly encouraging the notion of a gradual process to the quest for sudden ecstatic ecstasies. Denys, there is a paradox that once one has realised by the austere negative way that by symbols or images can express the being of God, one becomes marvelously liberated to use them without inhibition.

The book's treatment of the massive patristic evidence is spiced with liberal and well-chosen quotations. The author knows what to leave out, make his point incisively for him, and in no way seeks to give an exhaustive account of the theology of each of the writers he discusses. A central theme in his analysis of the mysticism is the indissoluble connection that the Christian writers make between the theological exegesis of the Bible and the experience of divine grace uniting the soul to God. That experience is seen by some in highly intellectualistic terms, and by others more in terms of feeling. Louth gives us a Gregory of Nyssa of special interest, namely as an intellectual mystic who comes regarded of his contemporary Macarius, if correct, this is of some historical importance. It is particularly good to have a book on spirituality which is trenchant and without any touch of sentimentality.

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# The sense of spectacle

By Gabriele Annan

EDWARD GORDON CRAIG:  
Index to the Story of My Days  
327pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£20.00 (paperback, £6.95).  
0 521 23696 6

Never was there a prophet with less honour in his own country than Edward Gordon Craig, nor with more outside it, or with more of a grudge that this should be so. The only recent book about his work is by a Frenchman, Denis Babel, while *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre* limply finds his theories too difficult to summarize and concludes: "His work has been most fruitful in Europe and America, but he has been somewhat overlooked in England, from whose theatre he seems to have been divorced by more than distance." Most people know only that he was Ellen Terry's son and something to do with stage design (but what did he design?) and that he wore a large hat with the brim turned back and a muffer, making him easy to confuse with Aristide Bruant. That was how he appeared as Isadora Duncan's lover in Kenneth MacMillan's ballet about her; when he took off the hat there was nothing to distinguish him from her beachboy lover, which seemed unfair.

He is wearing the hat in a stylish woodcut (by himself?) on the cover of this new edition of his autobiography up to the age of thirty-four. The book is a replica of the first edition of 1957: that is why it is beautifully produced, has lovely plates, charming vignettes and no index, and why it is very expensive: the first edition was itself a pastiche of the work of the Beggarstaff Brothers, James Pryde and William Nicholson, who were Craig's friends and teachers just before the turn of the century. The new edition has a lively and informative introduction by Peter Holland; he warns the reader that Craig's facts are not too reliable: not just because he was ninety-four in 1957, but because he enjoyed himself too much as a raconteur. After his first meeting with Isadora Duncan, for instance, he says they drove from Berlin to Potsdam alone in a horse-drawn carriage; whereas in fact they went by car accompanied by a Herr and Frau Doktor Federn; and the car broke down.

Index to the Story of My Days is thirty evenly divided between Craig's career and his private life. Both are riveting: his career because he was so multifariously gifted and original, and because his influence on stage design and direction, even on acting, is still to be seen in reproductions all over the world; and his private life because he was such a monumental shit and behaved so badly to so many famous people.

He was born in 1872, the second child and only son of Ellen Terry and Edward William Godwin, a distinguished architect and theatre designer. His parents were not married and they separated when he was still a little boy. So he grew up in a household of women (mother, sister, super-housekeeper, housekeeper and three servants) and I, the only male, felt this as something curious "is felt". The lack of a father gave him an affinity with Hamlet: he played Hamlet, directed Hamlet, continually made sketches for Hamlet, and had himself painted as Hamlet. He was not at all melancholy, though, but "amiable" - jolly to boot. He thought he had a trend towards madness, and he may well have been right.

Craig's childhood coincided with his mother's partnership with Henry Irving, who became a sort of surrogate father. Craig's loyalty and admiration for him never faltered, and he draws a convincing portrait of the great actor-manager as a kind, just, meticulous and highly organized man, not at all a temperamental or liquorious misanthrope. He always liked to find precision on the stage. Terry, even genius, I think, was a bit of a mess. I don't think he was a great actor, but he was a great manager.

faults being actressiness and too much absence. Craig's whole account of his childhood is unexpected, enchanting and full of vivid, palpable, imaginative recollections.

He was a very pretty boy and soon drifted into the Lyceum company, where he was a great success in whatever part they gave him. He also drifted into marriage with a suburban girl called May Gibson. "I had not married my wife, she had married me. I had for her the natural soft, cosy liking that one rabbit has for another rabbit." When baby rabbits appeared he drifted off again, leaving his mother to support them. He admits he was "excessively attracted sexually to women". He had innumerable affairs, only bothering to marry once more (the violinist Elena Meo). In his memoir he lets himself off lightly, and Peter Holland is not too hard on him either: "He found it becoming pregnant." Francis Steegmuller, in his edition of Isadora Duncan's letters to Craig, is much more severe. If I have got it right he estimates that by the time Craig gave Isadora her much wanted illegitimate child in 1903 he already had seven others; one more was born before he arrived in the following spring; there were also four legitimate children by May Gibson, making a grand total of thirteen by 1906. Goodness knows what happened after that. It is not the numbers, though, that make Steegmuller indignant: it is Craig's unbelievable callousness to Isadora. That, of course, does not emerge from Craig's own debonair account of their affair: what does is a portrait of Isadora as a jolly American kook with a sense of humour when he was expecting a dancing governess; and perhaps because he was expecting that, he was bowled over by her art.

He was very skilful at getting his women to be useful. (He describes himself as a "life-sized egoist", but with manners.) His mother kept him for many years and kept his children. Jess Dorynne, May Gibson's immediate successor, I think, dogged by the magazine he was running at the time of their liaison: Isadora supported him during their; Elena Meo raised the money for his theatre school; and Daphne Woodward helped him write his memoirs in the 1930s.

Craig was light-hearted about his affairs, but he was deadly serious about his work. In 1897 he went through a crisis; he could not act, could not remember his lines - and on a rational, intellectual level he was disgusted with the theatre as it was. He had already been able to draw and had already taught himself woodcutting and engraving with the help of James Pryde and William Nicholson. Now he deliberately left the stage and supplemented Ellen Terry's assistance by sketching for newspapers; designing book-plates, making portrait drawings, and eventually by producing an arts magazine called *The Page*.

The turning-point came in 1900 - not just for Craig personally but also, in a sense, for the development of the European theatre. With his friend the musician Martin Shaw, Craig decided to produce Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. The very idea was revolutionary because baroque opera was never performed in those days. They gathered a cast of sixty amateurs and two professionals, and rehearsed them for six months in balls all over Hampstead. The performance was at the Hampstead Conservatoire, which had a tiered concert platform but no stage. Dispiringly NW3 though this venture was, the result was greatly admired by the critics and the educated public. Yeats was enthusiastic: "I saw the only admirable stage scenery of our time." For Mr. Gordon Craig, a play was never a beautiful simple effect of colour, but leave the imagination free to follow all the suggestions of the play. Yeats had said Craig's intention from what he saw of his work was to show the

realization must have been: for Craig's fundamental idea was to make the scenery, costumes, and action express the general atmosphere of the piece and to leave the audience's imagination free instead of nailing it down with artificial real trees and grass, and archaeologically attested scenery and props. From this production onwards he only admitted scenery that was essential to the action - a city wall, a doorway, a staircase, perhaps a bed - and only the props mentioned in the text: scenery and props were to express and symbolize the meaning of the play, not to decorate it. He did away with wings and flies, and instead of a naturalistically painted backcloth he used a plain sheet of colour (what we should call a sky cloth) "so that one felt (people said 'for the first time') a sense of space on a stage." He also got rid of the rigid head-on illumination by footlights, and lit the scene flexibly from the sides and from above with lights that could be moved and dimmed or turned up.

*Dido and Aeneas* was followed by *The Masque of Love* from Purcell's *Diocletian* and by Handel's *Acis and Galatea*. Then the funds ran out. Now Ellen Terry formed a company expressly in order to give her son his chance as a director-designer: she put on *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Ibsen's Vikings*, herself starring in both. The performances were artistic successes but commercial flops. Craig was outraged and never produced for the English theatre again.

He did not produce much elsewhere either. As Shaw unkindly said later: "Gordon Craig has made himself the most famous producer in Europe by producing nothing." (But Craig got his own back by calling Shaw a fat cat who had flattened the English stage by sitting on it.) The reason why Craig did so few productions was quite obviously that he was too difficult to work with.

His London productions had been seen by the German culture vulture Count Kessler. He invited Craig to do a play for the famous Court Theatre. The plan fell through because Craig insisted on, and must have known he would not get, "absolute power... over the play, actors, actresses, scenery, costumes and every detail". Kessler had another go and introduced Craig to Otto Brahm, the manager of the Lessing Theatre in Berlin which was famous for its high standard of production. But Craig could not tell the difference between collaboration and compromise, and quarrelled with Brahm (who was, it is true, indisputably wedded to extreme naturalism). He next toyed with Reinhardt; unlike Brahm, Reinhardt was eclectic and ready to try any style, but Craig sent it back. Among the very few productions he did undertake and complete was *Rosmersholm* for Duse in Florence; that ended in tears: when she took the production to a smaller stage, Duse was beside herself with remorse, but Craig refused ever to work with her again: she had wanted him to redesign her entire repertoire. "What they have done to your scene they have been doing for years to my heart", he wrote to her.

The best documented of Craig's productions is the *Hamlet* he did for the Moscow Arts Theatre in 1911, and many people have seen the photograph of Act 1 Scene 2: the King and Queen stand at the back of the stage which is completely covered by their vast gold cloak which the heads of the courtiers peeping through it. It is impossible not to be moved by the account in Stanislavsky's *My Life in Art* of the preparatory problems of language and technical difficulty of dealing with Craig; it reveals the earnest sweetness of his nature - and his humility towards another artist - qualities which seem to have rubbed off on the entire company. He also explains Craig's interpretation of the play in a fascinating manner. Everyone took immense pains; completely new stage equipment and lighting were installed. The scenery consisted only of neutral-coloured screens which were to move and change colour as the play proceeded without the use of a curtain. Unfortunately they collapsed their tea break before the audience arrived for the first night, so the curtain had to be lowered after all. But the system is still much used to-day and can look both fresh and effective because it is so flexible. Probably the least satisfactory element in Moscow was the acting: the actors trained in Stanislavsky's "psychological", naturalistic method were unable to produce the stylized spectacular gesture and movement that Craig wanted - spectacular in the sense that dancing is a spectacle. For he believed that although the performance emerges from the text, the words are no more important than all the other elements, and that the audience comes to see as much as - perhaps more than - to hear.



A drawing of William Nicholson by James Pryde, from the book reviewed here. Nicholson and Pryde, the "Beggarsstaff Brothers", designed sets and costumes and provided the posters for some of Craig's early productions. They also gave him lessons in drawing and engraving and Craig later tried his hand at posters "à la Beggarsstaff".

Craig had long since realized that in order to achieve his ideal he would need a school to train his staff, including the actors. In 1908 he had leased an open-air theatre in Florence, the Arena Goldoni; it was his experimental studio where he built his models, made his woodcuts and drawings, wrote his books and his furious letters to the European press, and where he published his magazine *The Mask* - whose subscribers included Yeats, Yvette Guilbert, Jacques Copeau, Louis Jouvet, Joyce Kilmer, Toscanini, and Benvenuto Cellini. The Arena Goldoni was the perfect place for a school and it opened in 1913 - just in time to be closed down at the outbreak of war.

Even without the school, though, Craig's influence spread wide: through *The Mask* which he wrote pretty well single-handed; under different pseudonyms, through his books and articles; and especially through exhibitions of his work all over Europe and even in London. His designs convince more than his often too vague prose: they are breathtakingly beautiful and atmospheric, and quite different from the much more functional creations of his contemporary Adolphe Appia - whom, amazingly, he admired, even though he was sometimes quite

ITALY

LAWRENCE DI STASI:

Mal Occhio: The Underside of Vision  
199pp. San Francisco: North Point Press. \$12.50.

"Forza malefica," says Le Monnier's dictionary, "attribuita dalla superstizione popolare ad una forma di ostilità sorda, ostinata e peccaminosa", and it sets the word solid: *malocchio*. Lawrence di Stasi's separation of the two elements, like electrical wires that must not touch, seems an apotropaic act, but it primarily signals a concern with the *occhio* in general, from which evil may be dissociated only to disclose a greater, impersonal and primordial, *mal*. Some of us have the evil eye; all of us have evil eyes.

Mr di Stasi is an American of Neapolitan origin on his father's side. Cut off from the Italian south, he is far from cut off from its culture. The *malocchio* studiously crossed the Atlantic, along with Saint Januario, pasta, and the tradition of the protective *padrone* or *padrino*. Innocent non-Italian Americans assume that Italo-American culture represents the peninsular totality, forgetting that the North saw little need to emigrate. Italian food means, to New Yorkers, the monstrous spaghetti platters of Mamma Leon!; there are few restaurants that serve the pasta-less refinements of Bologna. And so it is assumed also that all Italians make the sign of the horns or carry an amulet against the wicked eye, whereas this is a Southern speciality, like tomato paste and pizza. On the other hand, the South has been infecting, through its work-seeking immigrants, the North for a long time. The Milanese try to ignore the tomato, preferring a patrician white diet, but Napoleon's cook found tomatoes on their way to the battle of Marengo. The Mafia is in Turin, and the evil eye operates in the shadow of the Alps.

You will find the *malocchio* as much in Rome as in Naples. I have seen Roman prostitutes make the apotropaic horn-gesture in the presence of a priest. This is not, as some say, because a priest is an androgynous monster, skirted man and testicular woman, but because, having given up the joys of copulation, priests have received the compensatory malolacur gift. The older gods had the sense to make Tiresias blind. To possess the milk-turning or cow-killing endowment does not of necessity argue a studied malevolence. One has to guard against the effects of the bad eye, but one bears no ill-will against the *jettatore* or throw-

er of the maleficent beam. Some people are clumsy, others accident-prone, others have the evil eye. Pope Pius IX, a kind and clever and holy prelate, had it in abundance. Driving through Rome after his coronation, he cast light of intended beneficence on a nurse holding a child at an open window. At once the child fell to the street and was killed. From then on his reputation as a prime *jettatore* was secure. One of his contemporaries said:

If he had not the *jettatura*, it is very odd that everything he blesses makes fiasco. When he blessed our cause against Austria in 1848, we were winning battle after battle, doing famously. Suddenly, everything goes to pieces. The other day he went to Santa Agnese to have a great festival, and down goes the floor in collapse, and the people are all smashed together. Then he visits the column to the Madonna in the Piazza di Spagna, and he blesses it and the workmen, and of course one of the workmen falls from the scaffolding the same day and kills himself. There is nothing so fatal as his blessing.

One of the most distinguished of living Italian scholars, whose great book on English romanticism will be well known to readers of this periodical, has reputedly the power of the *jettatura*, and to say this is not to defame him. I am forbidden to mention his name in Italian literary circles, though his initials are harmless. Like grace or ruin, the *malocchio* falleth where it listeth.

Often the bad eye is feared for innocent children, and the admiring gaze of a childless aunt can generate a fever or headache, but envy can operate very nastily on a pregnant woman, just as it can on a loving cow. To ward off the effects you can carry an amulet. The reader may believe this or not, but at the moment of typing the word one of its referents rolled out on to the central plain of my table from the space beneath a trough of books. It must have been there some time: I cannot remember buying it. It is a twisted horn in red plastic surrounded by a gilt coronet. It resembles a large red pepper, and it is comfortably thymalline in the hand. The response to the *malocchio* is often genital, and some have interpreted the phallic amulet as a symbol of male generative force opposed to the female destructive. And yet the ceremonies and diagnostics which are invoked when the eye seems to have struck are all handed down from mother to daughter.

The diagnosis and the cure are often effected in the same ceremony - the pouring of olive oil on to water. Oil and water proverbially do

# The maleficent beam

By Anthony Burgess

not mix: when they do, a natural process has been subverted: the bad eye is at work. If the globules reassert their independence and float again on the surface, then the spell has been broken.

Mr di Stasi is no floating globule. He desires to get below the aquafuge of the superstition, always a dangerous thing to do, since it leads to anthropological ambiguities which are more baffling than the *malocchio* itself. The oil and water lead us to the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, through Jung (di Stasi is very much a second-hand source man), and to the god Mercury, whose chemical counterpart is globular and unmixable, and who has been described as both *unctuosus* and *aqua permanens*. "Life is soul, that is, oil and water" (does this mean the benevolent tension of the *thymic* and the *psychic*)?

"Olive oil was considered by both Greeks and Romans to be the vegetable equivalent of soul-stuff." The use of olive oil in the *malocchio* ritual thus makes eminent sense. The reason is somewhat elliptical, but it seems to have something to do with the symbolization of vital tension and the evil eye's dissolution of that tension.

But why the eye? Why not another organ? The touch of an envious hand or the ripe hog of gunpowder would appear to be more dangerous than occur *invidia*. Di Stasi takes us all the way back to the Fall, an anomalous description of man's deciding to stand upright. All-four humanity was more concerned with smell than with sight; the genitals were hidden but emitted their oestral effluvia. With the upright stance came non-periodic sex, exposure of the genitals, the birth of shame, and the primacy of the eye, a primacy to be associated with shame. We need no anthropologist to tell us that the eye, as a social organ, is treacherous and a nuisance. We keep it averted

rather than subduing it to the rigour of what in anthropology, especially if it has been bitten by structuralism, passes for logic. The *malocchio* is a milky thing. The eyes of those who see too much, like Homer and Milton and James Joyce, are turned into miniature saucers of milk. Oedipus, who had shockingly turned desirous eyes on his mother, tore out his eyes rather than let the gods make them lactiform. In the Balkans the possessors of the evil eye are those who, having been weaned, go back to their mothers' breasts and suck illegitimate milk. Thus they learn of the dual, or Melanie Kleinian, mother - the one who comforts them with milk and the one who hits out when they bite. The *malocchio* tradition flourishes in ecotactile communities, which till the fields and keep cows. Their goddess - is a non-biting mother, fat, static and blind. The goddess of the pastoral nomads and the hunters is a sharp-eyed mother. But the two mothers are ultimately the same.

It is the task of reconciling the sharp-eyed Artemis and the blind, fat mother too old to have a name which sets up taboos and bad magic. In the Semitic tradition no reconciliation seems possible: you may not consume the products of the dairy

and the meat of the shepherd or the hunter at the same meal. Build a pluralistic society, with cows in the valley and sheep on the hills and game in the forests, and the eye is both accepted and rejected: two mothers are in conflict. Some eyes are good but others bad, and this seems a reasonable compromise.

To get away from theorizing di Stasi in California to the realities of the poor Italian farmer's life, it is enough to observe the preciousness of the solitary cow, which gives milk and cheese and can be used for draught purposes, and donates its calf to the occasional festive table. At the Castello Crouchback a pallid cow is kept, like coal or wine, in a collar, and the cry of "La mucca c'è scappata" has the poignancy of the high calling is feared for, and the invocation of the evil eye needs none of the grandiose holism of Mr di Stasi. "Alongside the familiar and familiar binding in *mal occhio*," he ends, "there must equally exist that other, that subterranean intimation: that all Mercurial phenomena - the visual, the phallic, the egoic - are at some stage to be unbound or unbound, to yield at last to that more complete, that more all-embracing vision." Meaning, I think, that the *malocchio* is a symptom of man's sick separativeness (is he serious when he seems to derive sick from *stecus* or when he considers that the physician's probing of matter is really digging down the womb of the *mauer*?), our inability to enjoy the prephallic world to which drugged youth, our stoned or blind mentors, would lead us.

Mr di Stasi's publishers (this is his first book) have done him proud - fine typography, acid-free paper. His content stimulates only to obfuscate; he has not fully digested the many things he has read; the evil eye leads him to mysticism. I am content to grasp my plastic amulet.

## THE CONNOISSEUR 80th BIRTHDAY ISSUE SEPTEMBER

★BUCKINGHAM PALACE:  
THE INSIDE VIEW  
The stateliest home of England: new pictures

★EVELYN WAUGH'S  
VICTORIAN PAINTINGS  
His 'delicious Joys' and little Mulready's

★BILL McALPINE'S STEAM  
COLLECTION  
Steam age dream in an Oxfordshire garden

★CONTEMPORARY ART:  
THE REALIST  
ALTERNATIVE  
How to tell the wood from the trees

★AND: THE INVESTMENT  
POTENTIAL OF THE  
IMPRESSIONISTS  
(How does your Renoir measure up?)

## Abhorring a Vacuum

Pearlmother dawn, it is fairly true.  
"The mind divests itself  
of any belief in the mental"

but my asept fragments  
fall back together into a shape  
doing things with cutlery.

Outside the pane, frondage and dewdrop-cluster,  
thy birds in their twelve-tone clamour  
recommence continually;

no one I can see observes me,  
who fade like blown steam.  
Dory-dim, I battle back as  
the illusion of personality  
nimbly me for a moment like  
slant light through a tram door.

It passes. I am lived  
by who knows what, the gene's blind way  
of making another game.

Whatever has been writing this down gets out  
from behind the wheel and  
walks away.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe



# The colonizing word

By Valentine Cunningham

GEORGE LAMMING:  
Of Age and Innocence  
412pp. Allison & Busby. £7.95  
(paperback, £3.50).  
0 85031 383 6

If a test of great novels is that they not only bear re-reading but also keep on inciting new readings, continually revised versions of themselves, George Lamming's *Of Age and Innocence* has strong claims to greatness. Arrestingly, this fiction about the perils and evils of late colonialism, so typically radical when it first appeared in 1958, doesn't behave as a twenty-three-year-old reissue reasonably might. This, it turns out, is no mere historical relic of anti-colonial struggles. It's not like, say, Cuzco's *L'Étranger*, limited date-stamped by the era of its conception. It reads, in fact - and not least because of its intricately worked-out concerns with the speaking, writing and reading of the colonial subject - as though it had been schooled on the critical "revolution of the word" that most British novelists (Lamming is a Barbadian who lives in London) are only now getting familiarized with.

Being bowled over by Lamming's debt to the world of *École de Paris* modernities isn't, of course, a response that should ignore the plainer punchiness of his old-fashioned anti-imperialist plotting. The tough political analysis that made the presentation of San Cristobal, colonized island seething and erupting with hatred of its British masters, so telling in the 1950s, still has progressive bite. It is, as it were, *A Passage to the West Indies*, making hay with the bland myopia and hypocrisies of the British who insist on gratitude from their subjects for the gifts and benefactions of colonialism. It is, too, a book that has been best-seller, while they scramble tooth and nail by any means, open or deceitful, to retain their authority.

Crabbe, the Chief of the Police and of almost everything else, considers Shepherd, the charismatic leader of the united front of negroes, Indians and Chinese, a mere madman. Crabbe has been well schooled in the ancient "curriculum of privilege". Even enlightened Britons, the ones who edit papers with names such as *Truth*, and run the local Reith-style radio station-with-a-conscience, have had their humane visions blurred, absorbed as they have become into the mechanisms of Crabbe's suppressive trickery, the "conspiracy of privilege". It's a "wholly mad" situation, a perverse condition of mental and political schizophrenia whose delivering Moses had better be, as Shepherd is, a bit of a loony. A crazed world, no less, is shown to deserve the crazy apocalyptic it gets when the local loonybin goes up in flames, and innocent and guilty, native and settler, liberated and mutilated and maddened old are all even-handedly incinerated. In a way this achieved vision of fiery judgment comes about, like the later assassination of Shepherd, as the result of many accidents. But there are, Lamming seeks continually to imply, few if any accidents in histories like these.

Lamming's tale of terrible colonial doings has certainly kept its power to awe and terrify. But perhaps even more impressively, it is its attention to style and to style again, and again Lamming's varied arrays of glittering prose, so alertly responsive to the textures, the colours, the feel of the colonial place's natural surfaces, and so acutely aware of the visions, the dreams, the mysticisms fast-breeding amidst nature's hot lushnesses and excesses, recall overwhelming moments in Nadine Gordimer or Patrick White or William Golding. Like other great West Indian writers - the poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite, for instance - Lamming is keen to render the island's profusion of idioms and rhetorics, its almighty confusion of tongues.

He is, of course, plumb in the territory of glossolalia: for here Christian idioms provide a constant background and foreground. Shepherd's stump oratory was picked up from a hotchpotch of enthusiastic private pulpits. His actions and his death are programmed by fixations on the Throne of Grace and the Word of God that he's inherited from powerful Ma Shepherd. His people seek a truth that's "plain as scripture". Their everyday rituals are never far from the religious originals that feed them. One little island is said to be a place for bloody cock-fights: it's also where the twice-born are baptised in their celebration of Christian death and burial. Apocalypses come naturally to people so well instructed in the Book of the Apocalypse. In the end, in such circumstances, everything turns out to be (in Joyce's phrase) "synopticked on the Word".

This is Lamming's strikingly modernist note. His novel makes an extensive demonstration of the determining power of the word, of scripture, of story. The fate of the hotheaded Secret Society (that consists of negro Bob, Indian Singh, Chinese Lee and British Rowley (Crabbe's son) - the younger generation plotting in parallel with the secret contrivings of their fathers - is calqued on the island's legend of the Tribe Boys who fought the invading Bandit Kings, a story the boys are inventing and elaborating as well as repeating. Mark, the islander who's returned home with white Marcia, is writing a book about a famous three-fingered rebel and pirate and so enters inevitably into dealings with the mutilated fingerless thief known as Thief. Reading pages of Mark's diaries (we're given pages of them too) drives Marcia into the lunatic asylum and prompts the occasion of Shepherd's death. The fascination of letters - the cigarette lighter, it might be, lettered with Singh senior's name, given to Rowley as a badge of membership in the Secret Society, and the immediate engine of apocalyptic; or the elusive letter Crabbe writes planning Shepherd's sticky end ("Turn in the letter... Don't burn the letter", urges the dying politician; "How can we get the letter?" demands the Attorney General).

## Bottoming out

By Galen Strawson

CHARLES BUKOWSKI:  
Factotum  
205pp. W. H. Allen. £6.95.  
0 491 02805 9

Charles Bukowski's Henry Chinaski is not a factotum in the usual sense of the word - he's not what the employers at one of the factories he works in call "the extra ball-bearing", the guy who "sees that... no grime coats the windows. That small repairs are promptly made out. That overfed powerful women do not have to carry small packages". He's a factotum because he does a hundred different jobs in a hundred different establishments, all over war-time America but mostly in Los Angeles, never, lasting more than a few weeks before being sacked.

Chinaski is a stylist. An improvident, lovely rogue, if he's not getting the sack and reverence cheque that goes with it, not up-beg with a woman, not drunk or purblind, not playing the horses, then he's writing short stories and printing them out by hand (he can't keep typewriters out of pawnshops) and sending them to magazines. On the run, he reads Henry Miller on the Greyhound bus all the way from Los Angeles to Miami. "He was good when he was good and vice versa." (But does that mean he was good all the time, or that he was also bad when he was bad?)

al: "The letter will tell more", insist voices in the crowd) - the letter's imaginative grip is as firm as Poe's "The Purloined Letter" or Woolf's *Jacob's Room*.

Nor, even more notably, does Lamming quite stop there. His novel stresses the importance of granting the poignancy of words and scriptures. It underscores the relationship between decent human contacts and right reading (a black policeman beams the colonizers' traditional refusal to read people like him with due attention: "My face hold a meanin' too, an' any stranger here must read me like one man learn to read another he hold in friendship"). It avails those charred lunatics little, for instance, that Ma Shepherd faithfully read to them the Word of God. What's more, words don't just falter; they initiate dangers. The Alphabet, we learn, was brought to this Eden by its original invaders. The Fall is literacy. When the Tribe Boys lived peacefully on San Cristobal, Laming's boys agree, they had "No training with alphabet... temptin' the brain to turn soft, and confuse everything or go extreme".

And it's impressed on us that to contemplate any annihilation of the word is to engage with the annihilation and confusions as awful as the annihilation that accompany the word all through this novel. This Mark recognizes very early in the story: scared of flying, he sits in his airliner seat clutching the dangerous pages of his diary as a vain consolation, aware that beyond the flimsy bulwark of that writing, beyond "the sign EXIT" painted in gold against a red margin at the top of the sliding door", there is only air, "and the air in an infinite superfluity registered nothing. There was an absence of things outside; and that absence, transparent and impenetrable, had taken meaning from his mind". It's the sort of reflection that has become a modish since Lamming, altogether more important things this text has to say to us now, that it feels such moments as agonized ones, and so speaks rebukingly to the swelling fog of glib little Derrida-ans who profess equanimity about the apocalyptic horror of precisely that "absence of things outside".

By Peter Lewis

KEN BELL:  
Black Pudding Republic  
358pp. Newcastle: Frank Graham.  
£7.50.  
0 85983 175 2

Considered as a work of art, Ken Bell's first novel *Black Pudding Republic*, which was largely written in the early 1970s but has only now found a publisher, leaves a great deal to be desired. Structurally, it is unwieldy and ramshackle; many novelists would have obtained two or even three books from this baggy monster of 175,000 words. As narrative - and it is an extremely full narrative covering about half a century - it is often jerky and unnecessarily clogged with detail. Stylistically it is gauche, aspiring to an energetically colloquial idiom which its garbousness frequently undermines. Although Bell's use of a framing narrative set in the immediate future to surround the life story of the narrator, George Ridley, is relatively sophisticated, the total impression of the book is of artistic primitivism, of an almost Defoe-like innocence in handling the genre of the novel. The style of first-person narrative, the tracing of an individual life from childhood to late middle age, the chain of quasi-picaresque and low-life adventures, the narrator's involvement in various kinds of shady and morally suspect activities, his underlying although usually submerged integrity, and Bell's unsubtle characterization, all bring Defoe to mind. Indicative of Bell's expansiveness and dedication to *négligence* are the poems he includes at the end of every chapter, usually in ballad style and referring back to the content of the chapter.

And yet, for all its crudeness, *Black Pudding Republic* is undoubtedly an interesting book, mainly because of its prophetic urgency. As a self-proclaimed "English dissident" ("conservative anarchist" might be more accurate), Bell is a writer who feels he has something important to say about the human condition today, especially about the

shoe distribution companies, that are the vertebrae of tale that otherwise has little shape, being a tale about a life that itself has little shape.

If there is any other theme in this novel by the author of *All the Chinaskis in the World and Mine*, it is Chinaski's increasing concern with their bottoms and properly. Coming out the women's restroom at the Times Building in LA (applying for a job as a reporter, he makes it as a janitor), he is "conscious with the ass-wipe" (the lavatory paper) and moved to reflect that "even the most horrible human being on earth does serve to wipe his ass". That, coming from Chinaski, shows he takes it very seriously indeed. There follows a remarkable suggestion about what to do when left ass-wipe-less.

Is it an impartial concern for all-revealing *verismo* that leads Bukowski into these and other cloacal details? He misses out too much else that's a necessary and routine part of daily life for the suggestion to hold water. It's just Chinaski's thing. He's not any less attractive for it, and *verismo* or no, it *est dans le vrai*. That's where we leave him, unemployed and abandoned by Jan, glum in the willy-milly proof of his love for her - unable to get it up for a demented stripper.

Ira Levin's *Nightmares*, published next week by Michael Joseph (480pp. £7.95. 0 7181 20345), provides an opportunity to read three of Levin's best-known works in a single volume. It contains *A Kiss Before Dying*, which won the

social and political dangers of a consumer society dominated by multinational companies and international banking. This accounts for the futuristic (but only just) framework of the book, presenting an apocalyptic vision of Britain not after the bomb but after the collapse of democracy and the establishment of a corporate state dominated by "the Company" following the discovery of North Sea oil. The *Black Pudding Republic* of the title is not a future independent Tyneside, as you might expect from a Newcastle writer issued by a Newcastle publisher; it is a phrase describing a banana republic with oil, which is what Britain has sunk to in Bell's imagined future, complete with civil war and SS-style Civil Guards. Bell is working in territory not unlike that of Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor*, although the West Indies is a thriller-like pursuit of the narrator by determined killers whom Ridley eventually defeats in a manner worthy of James Bond. This produces another generic mishmash.

After establishing this manhunt in the opening chapters, Bell abandons it for 150 pages to provide a virtually self-contained Bildungsroman about Ridley's working-class childhood in Tyneside during the 1930s, his evacuation to the other side of the Pennines during the war, first love (Julia) involving a violation of the class barrier, some war experience at sea, a determined but thwarted attempt to begin a new life in Canada soon after the war, and his return to England and reunion with the now-married Julia. This part of the book reads like a somewhat heightened autobiographical memoir, and is the most conventional and successful section, although less permeated by Bell's visionary inventiveness. Even so, the war and North American episodes in particular allow him to expatriate on various socio-political subjects: totalitarianism, Zionism, nineteenth-century persecution of the Indian peoples, the heinous crimes committed by moderns and liberals as well as extremists.

After a flashback chapter which returns to the manhunt, the novel continues with what Defoe might have called *The Further Adventures of George Ridley*, tracing his life through the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s as he develops from a small-time con man into a legitimate businessman working in the field of public relations (ie, big-time con man). In this capacity, Ridley is partly responsible for destroying the fabric of British life, allowing a multinational oil consortium to take control of the country, ostensibly governed by a completely debilitated and demoralized coalition. The main narrative eventually catches up with the events described at the opening, and Ridley as an ageing James Bond finally takes on the system virtually single-handed to strike a blow for individualism and freedom by blowing up the London headquarters of the Company.

The narrative in the second half of the book often serves as a platform for Bell to air views on anything and everything, and he touches on just about every major world issue of the last few decades, from the wars in Vietnam and Rhodesia to the world of high finance. What emerges is a vision of ideological disarray, moral collapse, and political disintegration. Bell sees democracy being undermined from within and ordinary people not only at the mercy of forces they fail to recognize but also ruthlessly manipulated to accept what is against their best interests. *Black Pudding Republic* is a confused, inconsistent, and poorly written novel, but as a fiction of ideas it possesses a number of redeeming features, and at its best is thought-provoking and disturbing.

Edgar Allan Poe award for the best suspense novel of the year when it was first published in 1952, and *Rosamund Baby* (1967) and *The Stepford Wife* (1972), both later to achieve notoriety as films.

# The testing out of tomorrow

By Robert Boyers

NADINE GORDIMER:  
July's People  
160pp. Cape. £5.95.  
0 224 01932 5

*July's People* occupies a special place in Nadine Gordimer's writing. Like her recent novels, it is richly inventive, full of sharp observation and a solicitude that never carries over into sentimentality or defensive irony. Like her short stories, it searches for the emblematic moment in every dramatic encounter, and refuses to say more than is necessary when to do so would be to falsify the experience of characters who know, finally, very little. In some ways a sequel to her great work, the novel *Burger's Daughter* (1979), it is also decidedly a lesser work, relying as it does upon the reader's willingness to be sustained by the shadowy or spectral reference in place of the densely imagined political universe of the earlier book. *July's People* marks a new stage in the evolution of Gordimer's art, a stage in which she can take for granted her reader's interest in what she has to say and his familiarity with the issues at hand. Like *V. S. Naipaul's In a Free State*, it is comfortable with the hypothetical because it knows how near to being realized it is. And it knows, too, how alert the reader will be to the prospect that menace will turn to terror, the fantasies of haunted figures to the sufferings of actual men and women.

Gordimer, of course, has become a world-class novelist. She has made the landscape of South Africa familiar to us in the way that Solzhenitsyn has made the Gulag familiar. But to speak of her as a South African novelist is to suggest that, like Solzhenitsyn, she is a writer with a mission and a theme. In fact, though she has a subject and that subject is South Africa, one feels that she has always been interested in bigger game. Even *Burger's Daughter*, with its detailed examination of South African dissidence, seems more a study of human frailty and the well-springs of political conviction than a definitive portrayal of Gordimer's society. That it will seem to us, as we read, to say as much about that society as any other document we can imagine is a measure at once of Gordimer's skill and the limited access most of us have had to her country.

In *July's People*, one sees for the first time in Gordimer that South Africa is only the proximate cause of a general nightmare. It is a nightmare of injustice and retribution, of betrayal and dispossession. Often told by others in the accents of apocalyptic, it is recast by Gordimer not as science fiction but as a sequence of small encounters leading nowhere. Not the explosive end of things as known but the playing out of uncertainty is the burden of her drama. Though she mistrusts even the enlightened values she shares with most of her readers, she manages to speak effectively across the abyss of our knowing attitudes, our decent liberal pieties.

*July's People* is set in a South Africa beset by open racial conflict and revolutionary activity. The whites have fled to the airports, looking for a way out, or have gone into hiding, waiting for events to break their way. What was, in *Burger's Daughter*, a possibility foreseen, dreaded even by those for whom apartheid was intolerable, has here become a reality. Throughout the new book one hears Gordimer intoning some version of the expression "the chickens have come home to roost". If she takes no pleasure in the disorder and terror, she none the less intimates that what has happened is necessary. If no good can come of it, no general good was ever likely to emerge from the prior dispensation either. At least, in the present chaos, the chaos imagined in this book, no one will any longer pretend that there are reliable answers to the standard questions. Even the most intimate relationships are torn open

and exposed to severe scrutiny in the wake of the encompassing disorder. Nothing, Gordimer tells, exists in isolation from anything else. The structure of power in the society, the economic roles assigned to individuals, have everything to do with the shape of our desire and with the intensity and duration of our needs. What we thought we wanted and thought we felt may not seem compelling when we imagine our lives as if they were new, as if no prior commitment could claim us.

"July's People" are Bam and Maureen Smales and their children, forced to flee with their servant July to his remote home village. There they confront the apparent end of their former lives and the beginning of something they have not the wisdom or the courage to understand. For if "the old is dying and the new cannot be born" - as the epigraph from Gramsci indicates - neither can those affected decide quite how they ought to feel about the progress of events. It is one thing for the Smales to consider that things may improve once one or another revolutionary cadre has established its authority. It is another thing for them to consider that an efficient policy would move rapidly to dispossess all whites of their property and to throw them out of the country. Just so, the black servant accustomed to decent treatment by his employers may wish to treat them decently under new, much altered circumstances. But he is likely also not to know what to do with them when they make demands upon him he has no way of negotiating. Lacking approximate experience, neither the Smales nor their former servant can deal satisfactorily with the problems they face. Competence, it seems, is only competence to do this thing or that when one knows what is expected. Kindness is one of a repertoire of gestures one makes when one knows what such gestures cost and how others will receive them. Once the power relations are altered, the various actors are reduced to primitive intuitions. They respond not to things present but to the shapes of a remembered experience that has disappeared.

The title of Gordimer's novel points to those altered power relations, according to which July, who was theirs, now has the Smales very much in his keeping. He sets them up in his mother's house, sees to their elementary needs, advises them on where they are and are not to wander. He also takes, without asking their permission, the keys to their car, and disappears with it when he wishes. When confronted angrily by Maureen, he calmly tells her that he does what has to be done, that he is master of the situation, and that no one can any longer demand to see his driver's licence or even the passbook he has had to carry all his life. Later, when she attacks him rather more vigorously, he reminds her that she has always treated him as a responsible person, and with the words "Ma, I'm your boy" and "There in town you are trusting your boy for fifteen years" turns the argument against her in a way she will never be able to answer. Gordimer works out the terms of the encounter so that they cannot be lost upon anyone.

The absurd "boy" fell upon her in strokes neither appropriate nor to be dodged. Where had he picked up the weapon? The shift boss had used it; the word was never used in her house; she priggishly shamed and exposed others who had challenged it in the mouths of white shopkeepers and even policemen.

Even as she says such things to herself, Maureen Smales knows that she has lost what there is of an argument. For though she has indeed lived by the standards of a decent liberal conscience, she has benefited by keeping July in the condition to which his kind is accustomed. She has seen to it that, he lives apart from his family, permitting him to return to his rural home for a brief stretch one year in every two. She has, probably to assuage her guilt, permitted him also to keep a woman

in his room in her house. By South African standards, she has done well enough, but she has done nothing that would compromise a life of privilege that is made possible only by maintaining blacks as a subservient class.

Gordimer doesn't presume to dictate what might better have been done. Clearly, middle-class people like the Smales cannot make themselves into political activists and simply go to prison without looking back. For them that can never have been a real option. They might have left the country for Canada or some other place, leaving behind the rather exotic privileges to which they are attached. But that, so it seemed to them, would have been to give up, to leave the field to the more brutal and unscrupulous whites. Gordimer has elsewhere drawn so sharply. It would, moreover, have left them without the property and other material supports they need to feel capable, appealing, viable. When, having some of those supports, Maureen Smales one night casually undresses and bares her breasts in front of her husband, it "was not an intimacy", Gordimer tells us, "but a

castration of his sexuality and hers". July may feel capable as never before, driving a car, recommending to his former employers that they adopt this course or that to protect themselves. His changes can be nothing but drift and feel inadequate even to the requirements of a mundane intimacy.

It is understandable that Gordimer should have wished, after *Burger's Daughter*, to return to the lives of more or less ordinary people. The earlier novel, with its cast of gifted and unusual characters, could not but suggest that what people do, they choose to do. They may not always seem equal to events, but they move quickly to see where they have failed, and regard every new encounter as in some degree a test of their adequacy. The new novel is less hopeful about us, not at all confident that we can break past the roles and expectations to which we are inured. Even our language seems inadequate to say what we mean, if we can know what we mean when we lack the words to say it to ourselves. More than once in *July's People* the main figures, including July, are made to feel that they bring to what

## Trout-fishing in Ireland

By Judith Cherniak

SUSAN CHEEVER:  
A Handsome Man  
234pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.  
£6.95.  
0 297 77980 X

In Susan Cheever's first novel, *Looking for Work*, the plump heroine, an out-of-work journalist named Sally, is invited to Ireland by a writer and socialist named Colin whom she has met at New York publishing parties.

In this second novel, the plump heroine, a publicity "black" named Hannah, has accepted the invitation. The man is now called Sam; a glamorous and successful publisher, he is a member of New York's inner literary circle, and father of an obnoxious young high-school dropout named Travis, who has been invited at Hannah's urging to come along on the Irish holiday as a means of rapprochement with his rich but selfish Dad. Also figuring in the plot is Hannah's younger brother Jake, an intellectual Harvard student who for some reason is deemed a suitable companion for young Travis, and who serves as the novel's triangulator, that predictably develops during two weeks of Irish fog and mist. Jake, humiliated by his poor showing in a tennis game, abruptly leaves the de luxe hotel-cum-castle at which the quartet are ensconced; the tensions disturbing the remaining three are aggravated by an ill-considered excursion over the border to war-ravaged Londonderry; and father and son find that they have both less and more in common than they supposed.

*A Handsome Man* is meant as a study in the forms of selfishness afflicting lovers, father and son, the young and the not-so-young (Hannah is thirty-ish, Sam fifty-ish). Susan Cheever was probably see him in the tradition of the Fitzgerald tradition ("The rich are their own nation", her heroine discovers). Her prose is clean and transparent, her tone ironic. Author and characters share an obsession with money and the things money can buy, and are irresistibly attracted by the glamour of a world which really seems to have nothing at all to recommend it. Branching out from the Fitzgerald tradition, Susan Cheever is mildly feminist in her evenhanded treatment of personal vanity (the "right" and wrong clothes play a large part in the heroine's consciousness), and in her reversal of sexual stereotypes, both in bed and, symbolically, in the natural world, as in the account of the heroine's struggle with a large trout. She is good at capturing the sharp, surface impressions of an American

touring Ireland for the first time, especially in her account of the food, in which both heroine and author take a keen satiric interest. The contrasts on which the irony of the novel depends - between the faded romantic splendour of the hotel and the grim realities of Londonderry, between Sam's smooth surface and the hurtful passions within - are rendered in a plain style which eschews judgment and occasionally takes on symbolic resonance, notably in the "Epileptic", a spasm of young Travis discovering his true vocation in the physical exhilaration of marathon running.

But the novel is marred by a pervading sickness, a tendency to slip into woman's-magazine banality. "Why are you attracted to men with these difficulties?" "Have you thought that you might be afraid of commitment?" Such are the questions that agitate the hapless Hannah. Indeed, though we are told that Hannah, an avid reader of Hardy and Conrad, Yeats and Eliot, is exceptionally bright, there is not much evidence of this either in her conversation or her inner thoughts.

A minor point, perhaps, but in a novel that depends on skillful delineation of a surface reality, accuracy is crucial. If handsome Sam is fifty in 1980, after Lord Mountbatten's murder, then he could hardly have been a Naval officer wounded at Manila, as he would have been only fifteen when the Second World War ended. Possibly he fought in the Korean War - from which Americans did not return as war heroes, however - or else he is lying about his age.

The themes of the three stories are familiar enough: the ambiguity of religious passion, the fragility of beauty, the alternation of attraction and repulsion. The settings are deliberately contrived. There is nothing particularly original in the discovery of an erotic element in the mother superior's self-castigation or, in "Sur deux fleurs de balais", in the contrast between the white man's pre-emptive intellectualizing and the black girl's passion. What the story has to tell us is something else, peculiar to itself. It is an artefact, like the snake in "Le serpent noir", of which its narrator asks: "De chair, edé si puissant?"

To some extent its success depends on the reader's acceptance of the conventions and the writer's skill in providing precisely the right amount of background information to hold his story in place. The exotic settings of the three stories in *Trois femmes de race* are concisely and accurately conveyed and in "Dolores", the first and longest of them, Etienne brilliantly manages to supply the political information we need to understand his heroine's act of revenge, without interrupting the flow of the

*The Great Science Fiction Series*, stories that appeared in this famous series between 1944 and 1980, is published next week by Harper and Row (420pp. £7.95. 0 01383 X). Edited by Frederick Pohl, Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph Olander, the anthology contains twenty leading names in SF, including Brian Aldiss, Isaac Asimov, J. G. Ballard, James Blish, Arthur C. Clarke, Bob Shaw and Clifford Simak.

is unfamiliar a vocabulary striking only for its irrelevance. Confronted by an old village chief who wants to help the white government kill off the revolutionary blacks, Bam Smales resorts to formulas like "rural backwardness," "counter-revolutionary pockets," and "failure to bring about peaceful change inevitably leading to civil war".

The political intelligence that has fashioned this book instructs us in the proper reading of such terms. In fact, the words seem as devoid of meaning to Smales as they do to us. For do we not see that they were invented to obscure rather than to evoke the actual lives of those they presume to represent? Gordimer's genius is to have undermined the vacancy of the available terms and the weaknesses of her characters without recommending that we turn away from them in anger or frustration. Once again she has made us feel that, if a fine intelligence cannot discover workable solutions, it can always demonstrate how heretofore those forced to operate without that intelligence.

Even more damaging is the utter vacuity of the "handsome man" of the title, who is distinguished from less handsome men chiefly by an infuriating habit of addressing his girlfriend as "sweetie" or "kiddo" (echoing Bogart, possibly), and who occasionally produces lines of mind-boggling archness: "Wait until I get those tiny limbs of yours upstairs." A hard revenge on Colin-Cum-Sam, whoever he may be, with his cashmere sweaters and his flashy sports car - plainly a bit when it comes to women.

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ments like Marjorie Bowra's, on the poem beginning "I took my heart in my hand", when he says "No woman could write with this terrible directness, if she did not to some degree know the experience she describes." It all turns on the phrase "to some degree". Surely we are not to conclude, on the strength of certain scenes in *Marchmont*, that Shakespeare murdered a king? To what degree did Emily Brontë "know the experience" she describes in her poems - or in *Wuthering Heights*?

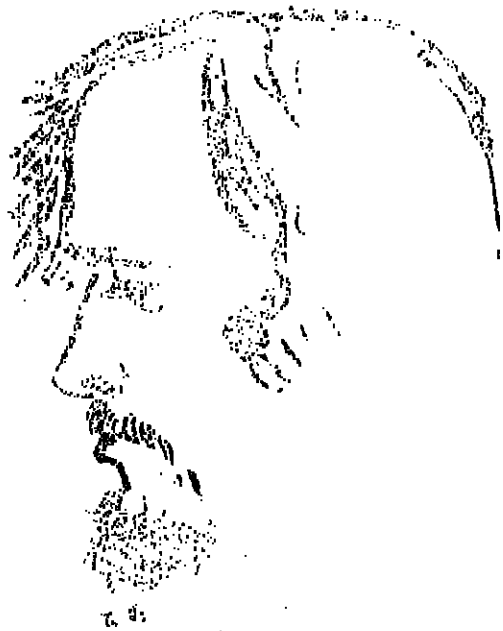
And this brings me to an aspect of the question which Mrs Battiscombe does not go into. I have mentioned Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson. In both these cases, as is well known, there seems to be a discrepancy between what is actually known, or can be plausibly inferred, about their personal lives, and the intensity of their poetry. They too have been credited with secret lovers and tragic frustrations. It is not possible (for sociological) fact is that all these women belong to a similar personality-type and share a similar cultural situation? (Elizabeth Barrett could be added to the list, before her elopement with Robert Browning.) There is the closely-knit family, fulfilling the need for affection and intellectual stimulus. There is the tendency to become recluses, withdrawing further and further from external society. And there is the poetry of all four women, with its reiteration of the themes of passion frustrated and renounced, of devotional religion, of death seen sometimes as a release from suffering, sometimes as the entry into a higher life, of "joy in its fullness".

This "typological" character of Christina Rossetti's poetry is well brought out by Lionel Stevenson in his book on the Pre-Raphaelites (1972). And many years ago Molly Mahood, in *Poetry and Humanism* (1950), drew attention to the great affinities of Christina's sensibility, imagery, and subject-matter, and the general emotional character of her poetry, with the Romantic tradition - especially in its "Romantic agony" phase. A favourite novelist, Malraux, more than once supplied themes and imaginary situations for the young poet to dramatize. Literary tradition, as well as psychological type, must be given its due weight - a considerable weight - in the appraisal of the poems.

All the same, I cannot help feeling sympathy with Mrs Packer. I find it difficult to accept her judgment, reiterated insistently, that Christina was a great poet; but, as someone who has curbed her own poetic impulses, I am attracted by this enthusiasm. And all readers must be grateful for the careful scholarship which Mrs Packer put into her work. The trouble is that she had a bee in her bonnet and it is doubtful whether it was a honey-bee.

It is not for a mere reader of the poetry, who has not himself carried out biographical research, to pronounce dogmatically on the work of biographers. But I cannot help wondering whether some of these inquiries have got on to the wrong track. Of course to the modern secularist the religious beliefs of a Christina Rossetti must necessarily be illusions, or delusions. But even from the psychological point of view it must be significant if Collinson, or Cayley, or William Bell Scott - had a more powerful Rival in Almighty God. I think Bowra was right to suggest that Christina's reluctance to marry may have been due, not to a commonplace fear of "sex", but to a doubt whether the love that suffused her life was something for which any earthly object was adequate.

And must it always be assumed that religious poets are only interested for what their poetry tells us about them? When Emily Brontë writes, "Then dawns the Invisible; the Unseen its truth reveals" why does it have to be assumed that the "truth" revealed is only something about Emily Brontë? I cannot find any poem of Christina Rossetti's that has quite the same power as that poem of Emily Brontë's (it is usually known as "The Prisoner"). Nor does she seem (unlike her sister Mary) to have had a genuine vocation to the religious life, in a more narrowly orthodox sense. But the religious



A sketch of Dante Gabriel Rossetti by Christina aged seventeen

aspect of her work is not incidental, not an excessiveness. It has been urged against Christina Rossetti that her range is very narrow, and she has been contrasted with George Herbert, to her disadvantage. When Herbert says, in "The Pearl", "I know the ways of Learning... the ways of Honour... the ways of Pleasure", we have a glimpse of something that is an asset to his poetry. "The strength of the religious poetry of the metaphysical poets", says Dame Helen Gardner, "is that they bring to their praise and prayer and meditation so much experience that is not in itself religious". But what, to a George Herbert, is "not in itself religious"? Can "religion" be compartmentalized in this way? I doubt if it can in George Herbert; I doubt if it can in Christina Rossetti. So many of the love poems, we are in a region where "love" and "religion" are only different words for the same thing.

Fortunately there are poems like "Remember me when I have gone away", or "My heart is like a singing-bird", or "When I am dead, my dearest" that raise no such intellectual and emotional problems. Christina's lovely singing voice and her direct, unmanipulated style and simple diction will always hold readers. And in her best poem, *Goblin Market*, she found the artistic expression, the "evocative para-symbol", which brings together the two sides of her genius: her intense sensuality, and her intense asceticism. All the biographers testify to these, whatever turns they use. Mrs Battiscombe's way of describing the division, as representing the "Italian" and the "English" sides of her ancestry, is a little fanciful. Some Italians have been very puritanical; we have only to think of St Francis of Assisi, giving thanks to God for "the death of the body". But however it should be described, and whether or not it was a source of conflict to her, this duality was the making of *Goblin Market*.

Everything about this poem is attractive. Its irregular rhythm, censured by Ruskin, would for most readers illustrate rather than "quality of the unexpected, the avoidance of the cliché in metre" which Ford Madox Ford saw as the charm of Christina's verse. As Mrs Battiscombe points out, it is an excellent poem of describing the division, as representing the "Italian" and the "English" sides of her ancestry, is a little fanciful. Some Italians have been very puritanical; we have only to think of St Francis of Assisi, giving thanks to God for "the death of the body". But however it should be described, and whether or not it was a source of conflict to her, this duality was the making of *Goblin Market*.

Is it an allegory? This has been suggested; though Christina herself said she had no allegory in mind. Various interpretations have been proposed. For Mrs Packer, as we

should expect, the goblins represent the poet's outlawed love for W. D. Scott, Maureen Duffy, in *The Erotic World of Fairy*, has analysed the poem as a sexual fantasy, without reference to particular individuals. And a ribald interpretation has appeared in the magazine *Playboy*. Everyone to his taste. There is no "correct" interpretation of *Goblin Market*. If you prefer to read it as no more than a delightful poem for children then that is what it is for you. I like something terrifying in it; a parable of temptation and sin. That it is irrelevant. The genius of Christina Rossetti was not compartmental, and the fable of *Goblin Market* can be seen to express, all the more effectively because implicitly, the fall of Eve and the redemption of human nature by Christ. The unbeliever can ignore this, and enjoy the extraordinary sensuous vividness of the goblins and their fruit. The devil, poetically speaking, always has the best tunes; Don Giovanni is more exciting than the "good" characters; in *Goblin Market*, Laura the wayward sister wins more hearts than Lizzie, who seems a bit wishy-washy. But none of this is an artistic fault, or detracts from the meaning. It only shows that Christina Rossetti was an artist of the old school of Spenser and Milton, who thought that temptations should be shown as tempting.

And of her work generally, it may be said that, while it may be fairly described as poetry of renunciation, it conveys a keen sense of what has been renounced. "In the world we shall receive great tribulation; but of good cheer: I have overcome the world." I think the reader of her poetry feels it to be superior to Charlotte Yonge's novels, in conveying more effectively the reality of the "world" that has to be overcome. As Yeats wrote:

I broke my heart in two,  
So hard I struck.  
What matter? For I know  
That out of rock,  
Out of a desolate source,  
Love leaps upon its course.

More than 200 historical documents relating to the lives of women in England, France and the United States, have been collected and edited by Erna Olafson Hellerstein, Leslie Parker Hume and Karen M. Offen under the title of *Victorian Women* (534pp, Harvester Press, £25.00/108 0084 3). The editors present a wide range of source material that includes diaries, letters, legal records, and the findings of official inquiries, in four main sections: "The Girl"; "The Adult Woman - Personal Life"; "The Adult Woman - Work"; and "The Older Woman". Among the topics covered are education, courtship and marriage, prostitution in London, and French cottage industry. Many of the documents are here translated or published for the first time and will, the editors hope, "give readers a new view of the nineteenth century, and... broaden their understanding of women's history".

## Adventuresses all

By Carol Rumens

AL EXANDRA ALLEN:  
Travelling Ladies  
200pp, Jupiter, £7.95,  
0 906379 10 4

The wealth of fascinating material in this account of eight nineteenth-century female explorers is at times almost submerged by poor organization and a slack literary style. The majority of the women here published their own vivid descriptions of their travels, and, quite justifiably, Alexandra Allen quotes lavishly from these. She fails, however, to include precise bibliographic sources, and though her work is obviously aimed at the non-academic reader, detailed information of this sort, as well as many more maps, would have added a great deal to its interest. But perhaps what one misses most from *Travelling Ladies* is any sort of probing of motivation.

These eight travellers were well-heeled, well-bred ladies who managed not so much to question as to ignore society's narrow definition of the female role. Three of them, Mildred Cable and Evangeline and Francesca French were, of course, missionaries; and Marianna North was an artist. They did not travel light, taking with them innumerable servants, and luggage that might include a tin bath, an expanding dining-table, and supplies from Fortnum and Mason. May French Sheldon (an American Southerner whose achievements included the translation of Flaubert's *Salammbô* into blank verse) added to her equipment an alpenstock, to which was attached a pennant inscribed "noli me tangere" - a command that must have acted as a useful restraining force on the East African tribesmen she encountered.

The most glamorous of the band was the high-born Jane Digby, not strictly a Victorian Adventuress (as the book's subtitle coyly describes its subjects), since she was born in 1807, but indubitably an adventuress.

Ms Allen's novelistic touch is at full brim in this chapter: "Felix Schwarzenburg... was the embodiment of all Jane's romantic dreams and secret longings. He was a dark, dashing and gallant foreign aristocrat, the Rittmeister prince to Jane's Cinderella, who swept her off her feet in the first dance at Altonack's as he clasped her to his hussar jacket". This was only the beginning of Jane's adventures; many lovers and several divorces later we find her creeping into the tent of Sheikh Medjoul - "her fourth and last husband" - as the author announces, with an almost audible sigh of relief. It was the pursuit of love, suggests the starry-eyed Ms Allen, that sent Jane Digby on her travels. But was it really necessary to slog across Damascus by yak in order to find what was obviously not in short supply nearer home? The assessment is surely an injustice to a complex, and brave and highly-intelligent character.

Whatever they were ostensibly pursuing, these women not only made significant contributions to the growth of anthropology and ethnography, but often showed a humanitarianism far in advance of the established views of the day. The self-righteousness pervades even the noblest of aspirations expressed by the preacher who delivered Livingstone's funeral oration in Westminster Abbey: "the humblest wayfarer in the far East or the furthest South has it in his power by fairness, by kindness, by justice, to leave behind him his stamp on those who in him, perhaps for the first and last time, have the chance of knowing what is meant by a European, and by a Christian". Daisy Bates's words on the tragedy of the aborigines, whom she lived among and nursed for several years, emphasize the darker side of western influence, one with which a woman was, perhaps, particularly able to sympathize: "Their age-old laws were set aside for laws they did not understand... They died in their numbers from the white man's diseases... 'Civilization', she concluded, "was a mantle they donned easily enough, but they could not wear it and live it".

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Edwin Abbott Abbott (1838-1926), author of *Flatland* and forty other books; also *Howard Chandler*, his life-long friend; any relevant information or papers; for a history of the fourth dimension.

Thomas Banchoff,  
(91440) Bures-sur-Yvette, France.  
tiffiques, 35 Route de Chartres,  
(91440) Bures-sur-Yvette.

Thomas Bennet (1673-1728): Rector, St Giles's, Cripplegate, London; Fellow, St John's College, Cambridge; author of *An Essay on the 39 Articles*, 1715. Information is needed of any surviving portraits and about his descendants, such as the married names of his three daughters by Elizabeth Hunt of Salisbury; for a study of his bibliographical work with copies of the 39 Articles.

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of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin  
53706.

Raymond Chandler: for an authorized biography dealing with the period after 1945 and with particular reference to the English years. I would be grateful for information concerning both unpublished correspondence between Chandler and Alvaro "Chile" Guevara and also documentation, photographs, etc. relating to their meetings in England and California.

Andrew Sinclair,  
c/o Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd,  
81 Clapham High Street, London  
SW4.

Joseph Conrad: *Notes on Life and Letters*. Information on the whereabouts, either in private hands or not listed in standard sources, of manuscripts, typescripts, and proofs for the pamphlet printings of Conrad's essays.

J. H. Stape,  
Department of English, University  
of Toronto, Toronto M5S 1A1.

Council for Education in World Citizenship: for a history of its origins and development. Of particular value would be press-cuttings before 1953, and the Annual Reports for the following years: 1945, 1961-62, 1962-63, 1966-67, 1967-68, 1969-70, 1970-71, 1974-75. Any documents sent will be handled with care, immediately photocopied and returned.

Derek Heather,  
Humanities Department, Brighton  
Polytechnic, Falmer, Brighton  
BN1 9PH.

Field-Marshal Sir John Dill (1881-1944): Chief of the Imperial General Staff (1940-41) and Head of the British Joint Staffs Mission in Washington (1941-44). Information, particularly about the Washington years, requested for biographical study. Personal reminiscences especially welcome.

Captain Alex Danchev,  
Political and Social Studies Department,  
Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, Camberley, Surrey GU15 4PQ.

## Two touching solitudes

By Mark Abley

JANE JACOBS:  
The Question of Separatism  
Quebec and the Struggle over  
Sovereignty  
134pp, Junction Books, 1979,  
(paperback, £3.95),  
0 36245 023 3

Some topics are, in some cultures, unthinkable. Despite its bland title, Jane Jacobs's slender book is devoted to an argument that may still be, to many English Canadians, almost as unthinkable as the "Face Rape" or "Benefits of Nuclear War" Jacobs, an American sociologist who has lived in Toronto since the 1940s, believes that political separatism can be a humane and valuable process; that Quebec would probably be better off, culturally and economically, as an independent nation; and that its departure from the Confederation would not cause the break-up of the rest of Canada. She writes calmly and with intermittent lucidity about feelings that usually provoke either passionate anger or passionate admiration. And in so far as she gives voice to ideas that are usually remain unspoken, *The Question of Separatism* performs a very useful service.

For most of the past two hundred years, Quebecois nationalism has been an inward-looking, backward-looking force. Even today the provincial motto is *Je me souviens*. Conscious of being hemmed into a continent dominated by the English language and the Anglo-Saxon race, the priests and teachers of Quebec tended to define their existence in terms of a historic mission of survival and witness. Defensive, at times sultry, these guardians of minority culture gave their political task a spiritual meaning. And when, during the "Quiet Revolution" of the early 1960s, the old Quebec began to be transformed, its new spokesmen adapted the transcendent nationalism of the past to their own purposes. Pierre Vadeboncoeur, writing in 1962, proclaimed that "The past will have to be denounced in the name of the future. We must project an image of the future that is vast and wonderfully mythical, one that will please vision. The future has never inspired us; it will be beautiful to see what happens to a people who suddenly rise up and learn of the monumental plan of their future." The rhetoric jars in translation, but even in French such ringing declarations sound dated now. It is one of the great achievements of René Lévesque and his Parti Québécois to have turned such vague ardour into a political force, and to have created a nationalist image of the future that has more in it of pragmatism than of myth.

Lévesque believes that Quebec's future lies in "sovereignty-association", a term that demands some explanation. Jacobs suggests that "Alfred Powers", "Group of Independents" or "Canadian League" might be synonymous with it. In brief, a Quebec which had successfully negotiated sovereignty-association would enjoy full independence from Canada, with its own system of taxation, its own seat at the UN, and its own membership of Nato and (perhaps) the Commonwealth. But the links between the sovereignty of English Canada and that of Quebec would be close: free trade, free trade, a customs union, and so on. This is some distance away from the outright independence desired by many supporters of the Parti Québécois, and as much of Jacobs's book is directly concerned with the relations between Quebec and the rest of Canada, the title of the British edition seems curious. (The original title, *Canadian Cities and Sovereignty-Association*, is marginally more accurate.) Jane Jacobs believes that financial affairs often make Lévesque nervous, and she actually criticizes one of his proposals as excessively moderate; in a few trenchant pages she shows that a common currency would surely

lead to friction and bitterness. Between the two countries, she suggests, that Quebec should gradually acquire a working currency of its own, as the Irish Republic did with relation to the British pound.

Her knowledge of Quebec nationalism is not founded on intimate acquaintance with Canadian history, but in the book's longest chapter she does attempt to draw a historical analogy to Quebec's present condition. Her chosen example is the achievement by Norway, in 1905, of independence from Sweden, after a peaceful struggle lasting nearly a century. In showing how the Norwegians wrested all possible concessions, whether economic, cultural or merely symbolic, from their political masters, and how the Swedes reluctantly came to accept the fiction of their realm, she presents behaviour on both sides that did "honor" to civilization. Furthermore, she claims that the separation released energies and talents which have made for a prosperous, alert Norwegian nation. (She does not, however, mention the accomplishments of Norway's greatest artists - Ibsen, Grieg, Munch and Munch - all of whom grew up during the period of nationalist ferment. This may be a prudent omission, for independent Norway has produced no artists of comparable stature.)

The story is a fascinating one, and it is true that certain parallels exist between the Swedish state of the late nineteenth century and the Canada of today. The ratios of population - Sweden to Norway, English Canada to Quebec - are similar, and the recent growth of artistic and linguistic confidence in Quebec resembles that of Norway a hundred years ago. But there are also a great many differences which Jacobs carefully minimizes. She fails to observe the centrifugal tendencies elsewhere in Canada, particularly in Alberta and British Columbia; nor does she take into account the overwhelming presence of the United States; nor does she make enough of the fact that a sovereign Quebec would divide Canada in two, with the economically deprived Atlantic provinces being separated by many hundreds of miles from the main part of the country. For all these reasons, Canada's very existence would be imperilled by Quebec's separation in a way quite unlike that of Sweden in 1905. The political differences between the Norwegian example and the Quebec position are equally striking. Even in the nineteenth century, Norway had a supreme court, a constitution, and a national bank of its own. Moreover, no Norwegians sat in the Swedish assembly. The Québécois, of course, elect politicians not only to their own legislature but also to the parliament of Canada, and for well over half of the post-war period, the Canadian Prime Minister has come from Quebec. There has been no more implacable opponent of separation than Pierre Trudeau.

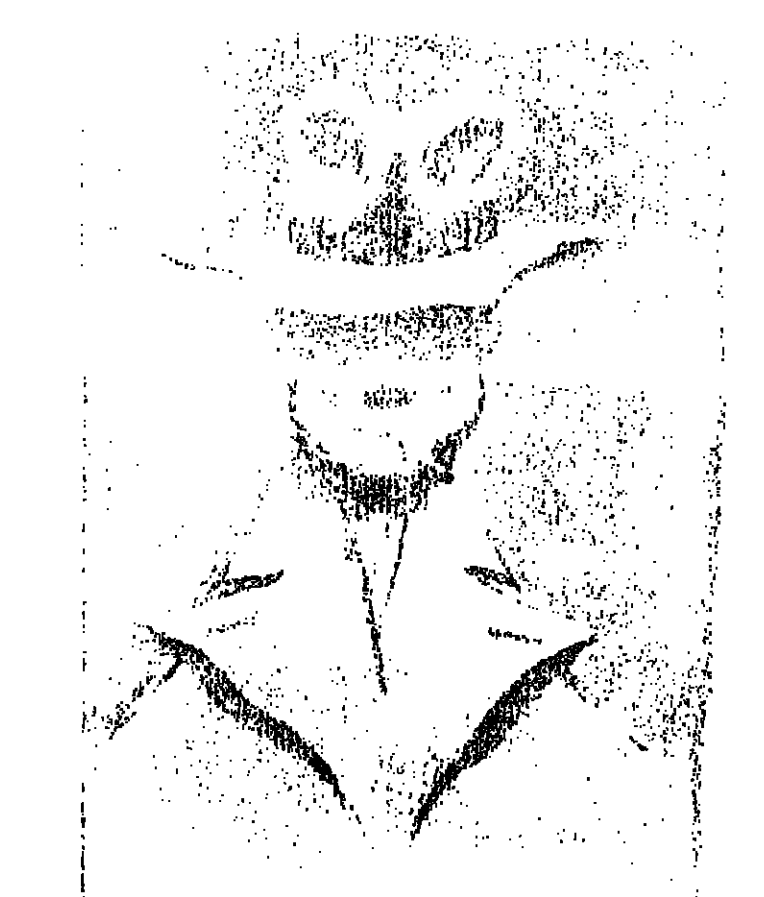
The most valuable sections of *The Question of Separatism* have little to do with separatism. Jacobs has a keen eye for the folly which underlies most economic thinking in Canada, regardless of language, region and political complexion: a general assumption that "the basic wealth of the country is... what can be taken out of the ground and shipped away". The health of the Norwegian economy is, as she rightly observes, based on the understanding "that wealth also consists of innovation, invention and development of indigenous manufacturing". A symptom of the predicament is that Canada sends grain to Norway, which sends farm machinery in return. Canadians, having been blessed by an abundance of natural resources, continue to squander their blessings by neglecting to develop industries based on invention and manufacturing, and even today a huge proportion of their industry is in foreign hands. Jacobs characterizes this as a "profoundly colonial approach to economic life", and one which the patient has largely inflicted on himself. As night he expected from the author of *The*

*Death and Life of Great American Cities*, she also writes, accurately about the differing economic destinies of Toronto and Montreal.

All this does not, however, add up to a satisfying or distinguished book. It frequently betrays its origin in the series of Moseley Lectures (Canada's equivalent of the Reith Lectures) delivered over national radio in 1979. Its voice and tone fluctuate between the didactic and the chatty, and Jacobs displays an annoying tendency to hurry away from some of her most interesting points. The style, too, is occasionally murky. "Levee" is occasionally used for "levee", and the sovereignty-association is worked out through negotiation in the first place, then after that be fleshed out through further negotiation, is a sensible procedure. "Shades of meaning disappear rapidly: 'The Canadian constitution is still... being amended in Britain', she writes, implying that a legal possibility unused for fifty years is somehow an active process. And in a bizarre effort to link sovereignty-association with behavioural patterns in the natural world, she discusses the interrelated populations of wolves and deer. Surely one of the aims of the Parti Québécois is to prevent English Canada from feeding on Quebec.

The work also suffers, on occasion, from a cavalier disregard for facts. Jacobs mistakenly states that Sweden belongs to the European Economic Community, and that Canada's constitution, the British North American Act of 1867, was drafted by Canadians alone. Occasionally an impressive-sounding statistic turns out to prove nothing: "Quebec is no province's poorest customer for Canadian-made goods, not even British Columbia's." Considering that Quebec's population is almost triple that of the four Atlantic provinces combined, this is hardly surprising. To say that the inter-provincial debating matches known as federal-provincial conferences "have become almost as vital to the actual workings of government as annual sessions of Parliament" is nonsense. More importantly, events in the past two or three years have rendered her analysis of Canadian politics inaccurate. No longer do most provincial governments oppose Quebec's demands for greater control over its own resources and communications networks. Now, the federal government faces an alliance comprising seven or eight of the ten provinces including such unlikely partners as Alberta, Quebec and Newfoundland, which are determined to resist any enlargement of Ottawa's authority. Jacobs implies that the federal system of equalization payments, whereby the richer provinces subsidize the economies of the poorer ones, is the most important factor in determining each province's attitude towards the power of the central government. It is a plausible argument, but one which is not borne out by reality.

Perhaps the main difficulty with *The Question of Separatism* arises from its timing. Conceived and delivered in 1979, Jacobs's lectures may well have had the salutary effect of informing English Canadians about the nature of sovereignty-association and the aims of the Parti Québécois. But after the clear defeat suffered by René Lévesque in the 1980 referendum (59.4 per cent of the Quebec voters decided not to give him a mandate to begin negotiations with Ottawa on the subject of sovereignty-association), the subject has temporarily diminished in significance. The book was clearly rewritten in some haste after the referendum had established that the Québécois of today, unlike the Norwegians in 1905, do not want to create a separate state. (The re-election of the Parti Québécois in 1981 had more to do with the continued popularity of René Lévesque and the general approval of his intelligent, uncorrupt administration than it did with the issue of separatism, which was deliberately played down during the campaign.) The question of separation will not, of course, go away.



"Spiv - London 1945" a pastel drawing by Mervyn Peake which is to be included in an exhibition of his work at the Waddington Gallery, 25 Cork Street, London W1 from September 9.

But the particular option of sovereignty-association may be modified according to events in the next few years, especially by the final pattern of the repatriated constitution and the authority gained by the provinces over language and resources. The interest of Jacobs's analysis of the 1980 proposals of the Parti Québécois may, therefore, prove to be largely historical when another referendum is called in five, ten or twenty years' time.

Jacobs approves of sovereignty-association because it appears to embody the principle of diversity. Here, she argues, is a city which has grown spectacularly through immigration from many countries, she feels that "the vision of an artificially bilingual Canada becomes simply arbitrary and silly". This is a direct swipe at Trudeau, and, though Jacobs may not realize it, a many of Quebec's leading spokesmen in the past, Henri Bourassa, for example, wrote in 1912, "I am sure that the preservation and expansion of the French language in each of the English provinces of Canada is the only positive moral guarantee of both the unity of the Canadian Confederation and the maintaining of the British institutions in Canada." In attacking the policy of bilingualism, Jacobs puts herself in the company of those (often bigoted) Western Conservatives who in the 1970s defied their party line and opposed the Official Languages Act: people whose vision of Canada is, unlike hers, uniform and unwilling. Bilingualism need not be an artificial condition, as the inhabitants of Montreal prove every day. And although Quebec culture has flourished remarkably in the past twenty years, Jacobs seems to regard it as a tender sapling that will survive only if sovereignty is soon achieved. This shows very little faith in a civilization that has long been a muster at the art of survival. Furthermore, her cherished ideal of diversity favour in an independent Quebec. Earlier this year, for instance, the Montreal sociologist, Hubert Guindon, argued that "The time has come to define the limits of the English nation in Quebec. The process will have to be unpleasant and not particularly tasteful... and the methods will involve breaking the narrow electoral parameters that have failed."

The Parti Québécois has retained

something of the quality of a romantic movement. It has captured the emotions of far more people than its federalist opponents; and perhaps in this sense Canada has failed. The result of the 1980 referendum was greeted with little joy and much silence by the voters who had just rejected sovereignty-association so decisively. Many of them, sadly, had felt compelled to choose between their hearts and minds. Like many commentators on the subject, Jacobs uses and fails to comprehend the title of one of Canada's most famous novels: "We are supposed to feel self-immigrant to a city which has grown spectacularly through immigration from many countries, she feels that 'the vision of an artificially bilingual Canada becomes simply arbitrary and silly'. This is a direct swipe at Trudeau, and, though Jacobs may not realize it, a many of Quebec's leading spokesmen in the past, Henri Bourassa, for example, wrote in 1912, 'I am sure that the preservation and expansion of the French language in each of the English provinces of Canada is the only positive moral guarantee of both the unity of the Canadian Confederation and the maintaining of the British institutions in Canada.' In attacking the policy of bilingualism, Jacobs puts herself in the company of those (often bigoted) Western Conservatives who in the 1970s defied their party line and opposed the Official Languages Act: people whose vision of Canada is, unlike hers, uniform and unwilling. Bilingualism need not be an artificial condition, as the inhabitants of Montreal prove every day. And although Quebec culture has flourished remarkably in the past twenty years, Jacobs seems to regard it as a tender sapling that will survive only if sovereignty is soon achieved. This shows very little faith in a civilization that has long been a muster at the art of survival. Furthermore, her cherished ideal of diversity favour in an independent Quebec. Earlier this year, for instance, the Montreal sociologist, Hubert Guindon, argued that 'The time has come to define the limits of the English nation in Quebec. The process will have to be unpleasant and not particularly tasteful... and the methods will involve breaking the narrow electoral parameters that have failed.'

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# Honouring the historian

By Alan Bell

THOMAS PINNEY (Editor):  
The Letters of Thomas Babington  
Macaulay  
Volume V: 1849-1855. Volume VI:  
1856-1859

484pp each volume. Cambridge University Press. £40 each volume.  
0 521 22749 6  
0 521 22750 X

These last two volumes of Macaulay's collected letters see him at the height of his literary fame, the first part of the *History* launched with unprecedented success and the second being prepared to even greater public anticipation and eventual critical and commercial acclaim. In spite of this literary glory, increasing ill-health, belied by his robust appearance, prevented Macaulay from enjoying his public reputation to the full. He could privately relish his position (the first to have been conferred for literature, and literary earnings made the *Edinburgh* of fees and expenses easy to bear), but he was able to take scarcely any part in *Lords'* business: the honour was deeply satisfying, unexpected but none the less appropriate, and eagerly accepted.

Thomas Pinney's edition can be read almost as a chapter of publishing history as the production figures and publishers' statements for the *History* are chalked up - a 15,000 order (June 1855) raised to 25,000 by October, and five-figure cheques from Longman on account for the second part of the *History*. Its success was universal, most unexpectedly in the United States, where to Macaulay's genuine surprise ("I am as much puzzled as pleased. For the book is quite insular in spirit. There is nothing cosmopolitan about it.") the first two volumes enjoyed great and immediate reputation. There was opposition, to be sure: Croker's predictable attack in the

*Quarterly* was denounced as "a mere succession of untruths, blunders and mere's nests", and a word to the editor of the *Edinburgh* with a few useful factual corrections was enough to see the old opponent off the field. More troublesome, perhaps, were the detailed debates with private critics: a long correspondence with the aged Bishop Phillips of Exeter, and with Samuel Wilberforce, was necessary to sort out views on Cranmer and episcopacy, and there were a host of correspondents with ingenious solutions of the identity of "P.M.A.C.F." ("Père Mansuete, a Cordelier Friar") present at the deathbed of Charles II.

Such diversions were annoyingly time-consuming when an enormous amount of research was needed for the succeeding volumes, in public records and private archives alike. "Lord Spencer has invited me to rummage his family papers", Macaulay wrote to his sister Fanny in 1849, "a great proof of liberality when it is considered that he is the lineal descendant of Sutherland and Marlborough. In general it is ludicrous to see how sore people are at seeing the truth told about their ancestors." The research work, involving visits to sites as well as documentary study, was prolonged, and in 1851 Macaulay told Sir Charles Wood that "I do not think that I can justly be accused of tardiness. At least by comparison with other historians." Robertson, he reminded Wood, had spent ten years on *Charles V*, working from printed sources alone. Macaulay became totally absorbed in his work, daling routine archival enquiry to the London Guildhall "1689" instead of 1855, and leaving it unsigned. It was an absorption that was to pay ample dividends.

These researches were pursued alongside strenuous re-readings of the classics. "A great quantity of execrably bad Latin" went put away in 1852, and in 1855 a most pleasant month of mere literary idling and luxury" included the whole of Ptolemy and many Ptolemy

sources, and all Cicero's philosophical writings. Volume V of the *History* could now be taken at a more leisurely pace, whatever the public might demand; and the leisure had been well earned.

Public business continued, too, as far as declining health allowed (his condition necessitated a move from Albany to Cumpden Hill, where he might "respire freely"). Edinburgh made up for its previous rejection of its eminent former member by begging him to resume the seat, even on the understanding that he would take little part in parliamentary life. The offer of reparation for this "flagrant instance of the caprice and perverseness of even the most intelligent bodies of electors" proved impossible to resist, although Macaulay (dosed with "calomel" enough to set three bilious mammoths to rights) could not even attend the Declaration of the Poll. "To be elected, as I was elected, is certainly a great honour", he wrote to Broughton; "To sit is as certainly a great bore." Three and a half years were to see him applying for the Chiltern Hundreds, local honour satisfied, and the member's public ambition long since diverted into prosperously fulfilled literary channels.

Opulence enabled him to bear his fame easily, even when it led to his eccentricities being the subject of published comment, or to his being pursued by the dunning of a mad uncle, or finding himself at the mercy of bores at Clifton. "Nothing is so intolerable as a watering-place idler who, because he is weary of his own company, pesters others with it", he wrote of a conversationalist in a letter and dull enough almost to have been the author of *The Prelude*. (Macaulay felt it was but *The Excursion* again, "weaker and more tedious"; *My Novel* was much more enthusiastically received.)

As triumph succeeds triumph in Macaulay's life, it is balanced by further failures in his friend Ellis's. But however unsuccessful Ellis may be, he can still conjure from Macaulay's solicitous but never pat-

ronizing pen the best letters he wrote outside his family circle. Joint holidays are planned, with Ellis tactfully allowed to make a contribution for "tubs and towels"; public appointments are frankly sought for this friend of such high but unfulfilled early promise, very much down on his luck "in this capricious lottery of life". Ellis is cheered on in his anxieties, urged not to "make the evil ten times as great as it is by moping and pining and eating his heart", invited in sprightly Latin prose to taste the first cucumbers and speckled eggs of the Spring, and favoured with some of Macaulay's freshest correspondence, as when the rogue publisher Vizetelly's piracy of Macaulay's speeches (which made an authorized and corrected edition urgently needed) produced some distribs in imitation of Pope against Curll.

The family circle remained all-important. It is sometimes threatened with diminution, as when Margaret Trevelyan, the beloved niece Baba, marries Sir Henry Holland's son (it turned out to be a welcome addition), but sometimes finds renewal in the congenial company of the rising generation. George Otto's career had been watched with interest, even while he was at Harrow and especially as he rose to fame at Trinity. The young Trevelyan soon came to be favoured with some of the intellectual and scholarly letters hitherto reserved mainly for Ellis. Macaulay could take a pride in his nephew's achievements, but even they could not make up for his inevitable disappointment at the boy's father's return to India as Governor of Madras, with the knowledge that the beloved Hannah would soon follow her husband out East. "I heartily wished when [Hyde] Park on Friday that I could change places with him", he wrote to Ellis late in October 1859. Before the year was out Macaulay was dead, leaving the fifth volume of the *History* to be published posthumously, and his biography eventually to be written by the nephew whose prom-

ise he had long discerned.

This pair of volumes brings Professor Pinney's primary edition to its conclusion, with a full list of Macaulay's writings and a splendid 177-page index to round it off. As in the previous volumes, the textual work is excellently done, readings and datings are confidently and efficiently managed, and elegantly presented. The annotation is thorough and resourceful, resisting any temptation to discursiveness, its quality showing particularly in obscure examples, such as the use of census records for the age of a minor Trevelyan connection who died young, or in a helplessness that can provide a set of answers to the examination paper on *Sir Charles Grandison* which his niece Baba was to set her newly married husband before he could be declared "worthy of a degree in Richardsonian learning".

Macaulay's manuscript Journal has been placed under contribution, confirming dates, amplifying allusions, and sometimes sharpening the bland courtesies of correspondence (Edward Everett's *Orations and Speeches*, elegantly enough acknowledged to their author, are assessed as "a little more gaudy and interjectional than is to my taste - Ah and Oh"). The little we are shown of the Journal here makes us look forward the more eagerly to the edition that Dr R. Robson has in preparation. Mr Pinney's *The Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay* has added to Macaulay's reputation as a letter-writer far beyond what the extensive but oddly mangled extracts of Trevelyan's biography could have led us to expect, and the Journal is needed to complete the corpus of his writings. The Cambridge University Press will again earn our gratitude if they are able to publish it with the taste and skill which they and Western Printing Services Ltd as printers have devoted to the production of the *Letters*; but with these two volumes priced at £40 each (concluding a series that began in 1974 at £10.50 a volume) one scarcely dare think what comparable volumes of the *Journal* may cost when they eventually appear.

## Heavy going at the House

By Stephen Koss

NANCY E. JOHNSON (Editor):  
The Diary of Gathorne Hardy, later Lord Cranbrook, 1866-1892  
Political selections  
908pp. Oxford University Press. £48.  
0 19 82262 5

One of the vertebrae of nineteenth-century Toryism, who ultimately qualified as a sort of slipped disc, Gathorne Hardy commanded respect without generating excitement. The same may be said of his voluminous diaries, from which Nancy E. Johnson has culled "political selections". The originals, running to twenty-one quarto volumes, may be consulted at the Ipswich and East Suffolk Record Office. "About two-thirds of the manuscript text has been omitted" from this published version "by the removal of references to the weather" (with which the diarist habitually prefaced nearly every entry), "birthdays, visits to family and friends", travel itineraries, and the like. What remains is none the less staggering in quantity; though - like the man himself - rather humdrum in quality.

"GH", as he is economically tagged by the editor, tried unsuccessfully in 1847 to succeed his father as Liberal MP for Bradford. Nine years later, abandoning his legal career, he had better luck at Leominster as a Conservative. He held that seat unopposed until 1865, when he defeated Gladstone in a dramatic contest at Oxford. By his own reckoning, however, he did not embark upon his "official life" until 1858, when he was appointed to an under-secretaryship in the second Derby government. Then, in 1866, he entered the Cabinet and began his "journalising" in earnest.

Sir Robert Ensor identified Gathorne Hardy as "one of the best debaters and most esteemed figures in parliament". John Morley, writing as Gladstone's biographer, paid him tribute as "a man of sterling character, a bold and capable debater, a bold and capable debater, one of the best of Lord Derby's lieutenants". More recently, Peter Marsh has described him as a worthy exponent of Disraelian precepts who gradually "lost his fighting nerve". Ironically, these diaries fail to do justice to such attributes and tend to obscure them. Gathorne Hardy, especially after his elevation to the peerage as Lord Cranbrook in 1878, emerges as an awkward and insecure figure, lacking both the eloquence noted by his contemporaries and the driving ambition discerned by the editor.

A self-styled connoisseur of parliamentary oratory, Gathorne Hardy scorned those like Gladstone and Harcourt who addressed the House of Commons "on stilts", those like Bright and Dilke who indulged in "easy declamation", and even Disraeli, whose "speeches were occasionally 'too long & fine spun' to be intelligible to his own side. About his personal performance at Westminster, he was disarmingly modest. On August 3, 1866, for example, he "tried once" and evidently not too strenuously "to catch the Speaker's eye but failing went to my office & did not return". On May 10, 1877, having taken "some pains to prepare to speak", he was almost relieved to be denied the opportunity: "There are so many desirous to take part in the debate that one must make room or it will never end".

He was flattered to be classified among "the first men of the country" by the King of the Belgians, though he knew it to be "of course mere compliment". Being "happily conscious of many defects", including an embarrassing inability to converse in

French with foreign dignitaries, he "smiled" at his unflattering portrait in the *Spectator* (April 3, 1869): "I am sure I feel my incompetency in many respects & it does no harm to have one's attention called to what others see more clearly. I must try & mend!" Likewise, there was "nothing to irritate" in a *Daily News* article (December 13, 1872) that put him "somewhat low in the intellectual scale", at the same time tipping him for "a position in the party to which I have little claim".

The *Daily News* believed that Gathorne Hardy would succeed Disraeli as the Conservative leader in the Lower House. Others nursed the same expectation, but Disraeli decided in the end that Sir Stafford Northcote had better claims owing, among other things, to "more constant communication with the House and its members on a variety of subjects". The Queen never tired of declaring that, in this instance, Disraeli had made a mistake. Gathorne Hardy accepted the decision "without reluctance", more on account of "going on as before in all respects". A family man, who preferred to dine at home - he "got no dinner" on March 16, 1876 "as it was impossible to leave the bench except for a few minutes to swallow a basin of soup" - he saw no reason to suffer any longer the nocturnal drudgery of the Commons. As Secretary of State for India he gratefully transferred to the Lords, where he was amused to observe, "a long sitting" was one that lasted "until 6.45".

He bore no grudge against Northcote and thereafter accustomed himself to Salisbury as he had previously come to terms with "so unscrupulous a man" as Disraeli. In the course of a long career he embraced Bright as a defender of the constitution, muted his antagonism to Chamberlain, and perceived Balfour's merit and Camp-

bell-Bannerman's steadiness. Initially distrustful of Lord Randolph Churchill, whose "smoking... seems to me excessive & must be injurious", he eventually concluded on December 18, 1886 that the firebrand "shows plenty of ability"; days later, to Gathorne Hardy's "amazement", Churchill perfunctorily justified those first impressions.

There was one public figure about whom Gathorne Hardy never wavered. Gladstone was "courteous & gentlemanlike" towards him in the House, and a stimulating dining companion as a fellow member of Grillon. But, echoing Kingslake, Gathorne Hardy considered him "a truly good man in the worse sense of the words", a "good wise man who does bad actions & foresees nothing", "the destroyer of his country", a "shameless old falsifier of facts", a "great impostor", and an "old man" lifted on high by rebels & traitors. This furious denigration was shared by the Queen, who admired Gathorne Hardy and showered gifts upon him: books about Prince Albert which were treasured as "heirlooms"; royal portraits; a box of bonbons for his grandchildren, and an engraving of the Jubilee procession.

This book abounds in such catalogues, affording some illuminating glimpses of parliamentary routines. Although useful for dating meetings of the Cabinet and in identifying the ministers in attendance, it seldom reveals attitudes, those of the diarist included. "The Cabinet had nothing very special", recorded Gathorne Hardy on March 11, 1877.

"We had a Cabinet fully attended & settled many points yesterday", noted on December 1, 1889, "but none that I need put on record". Often, the information imparted is trivial and might well have been excluded, along with the weather re-

ports: "Thirls is dead, an event in France".

The diaries have been assiduously annotated - although the reader is assumed to have ready access to a copy of A.E. Gathorne-Hardy's "memoir", published in 1910. For elaboration and divergent points of interpretation, the editor directs us to *Hansard* and to various secondary works; these include not only Lord Blake's biography of Disraeli, but also the appropriate volume of Burke, not only *The Times*, but also the *Kentish Gazette*. A meticulous index helps to identify various names fleetingly mentioned in the text and to distinguish, say, John Morley from the 3rd Earl of Morley. A few minor participants appear incorrectly in both places (Sowler for example, is cited as "Fowler"). And, arguably, the undisclosed name of the victor in the 1890 by-election at Cararvon Boroughs is more significant than the fact that the Conservatives had previously captured the seat by a small majority; he happened to be David Lloyd George.

"A political diary is the most dangerous art form an author can adopt", according to Barbara Castle. Neither as a politician nor as a diarist did Gathorne Hardy take risks. "Why wash our dirty linen in public?" he asked his journal in 1885. "One cannot reveal history yet," replied in 1887 to a solicitation from the editor of the *National Review*. A firm believer in "secrecy", as he persistently misapprehended it, Gathorne Hardy betrays no Gladstonian intensity of emotion or depth of commitment. He is equally far removed from any trace of Disraelian wit unless one counts his jest that the proposed tax on matches in 1871 was a "modest flash (that) has gone out like a Lucifer". On balance, it is the tedium of the parliamentary experience - the heaviness of procedure and the intractability of problems - that he communicates most vividly.

## Power to the self

By Alastair Fowler

STEPHEN GREENBLATT:  
Renaissance Self-Fashioning  
From More to Shakespeare  
321pp. University of Chicago Press. £12.  
0 226 30653 4

No doubt all the classic problems of literary interpretation beset us as often as we attempt interpretation. (How understand parts before wholes? Wholes before parts? Genres before exemplars? Exemplars before genres?) But no one would deny that differences between interpretation of old works have a way of being specially hard to resolve. This is in part because few uniformities between past and present can securely be taken for granted.

Some have despaired of the enterprise and come to regard past literature as blocked off by a great hermetic divide. Fortunately, however, literature has many formal structures and conventions - especially generic conventions - which together make up a remarkable aggregate of systems of redundancy, or mutually confirming codes. It has, that is, an integrity that rises further above time's ravages than one might expect. Moreover (and this is a point missed by the early hermeneutic theorists), literature's various redundancy systems differ both in scale and in phase of historical change. Consequently, if the conventions of an old work are attended to with scholarly care, it may have much to say to us that we could not have invented for ourselves.

All the same, the difficulties of interpretation remain formidable. Can we even be sure that writers of the past were as like ourselves as modern writers are? Not at all: they may have been still stranger - and in different ways. So, in interpreting, we fall into the ways of bad biographers, uneasily aware that they should avoid "the thought" and "the felt" (since their subject's interior experience is inaccessible), and who write instead "perhaps he thought".

In our ignorance of the interior life of old authors, we invent what we like. Or else we pretend to invent nothing; in that case taking over the inventions of previous scholars. With living writers there are occasional restraints on interpretation. But the ancient dead just go on lying there as if we had told the truth. *Mortui non mordent*. We are safe from them: they never pick us up in the correspondence columns of journals yet extant. They are what we want them to be.

Yet almost the one thing, we can count on about our ancestors is that their feelings and interests were different. If we went back far enough, we should certainly find some *Pithecanthropus illiterateus* not even interested in breaking into the hermeneutic circles. But then, come to think of it, some people today are not interested in that, either. And this is the other thing we know about past people: that they all shared our belief in the doctrine of unchanging human nature.

Between these poles literary criticism veers, according to the change of the decade, or the moment. Currently, a few critics seem to work on the assumption that men have always been pretty much the same; so that no endeavours of scholarship - no constructs of former sensibility - can possibly take us further than simply reading, as if the work had been written today. As Stephen Greenblatt puts it, "we need... bring nothing to the text but ourselves". Others believe that sixteenth-century people (say) were so different that we have to devise constructs of them, and that almost any construct is likely to be nearer the truth than mere assumption of similarity. But paradoxically, those who exaggerate the differences may think it useless to psychoanalyse earlier motivations, and consequently rely perforce on an outmoded psychology in which the differences were levelled. Both approaches embody truths: mixture and balance are indispensable.

Both emphases appear in the American vogue for studies of self-shaping. Stemming from Neoplatonic studies such as Wittkower's "Transformations of Minerva" and Thomas Greene's "The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature", this has grown in very different directions, represented for example by Arnold Weinstein's *Fictions of the Self 1550-1800* and William Kerrigan's "The Articulation of the Ego in the English Renaissance" (which argues in psychoanalytic terms for a distinctive Elizabethan ontology).

For the most part, Professor Greenblatt belongs with those who make Renaissance man in our own image. In fact, he thinks that Renaissance man is almost more like ourselves than modern man: "We sense... that we are situated at the close of the cultural movement initiated in the Renaissance and that the places in which our social and psychological world seems to be cracking apart are very close to the places visible when it was first constructed." He practises, however, a "cultural or anthropological criticism" (paying homage to Clifford Geertz); so that for him it is perhaps not exactly human nature that we share with Renaissance man (Professor Geertz has said "There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture"). What may be shared, it seems, is rather "ideology". Greenblatt means to break the barrier between sociology and literature, and claim self-fashioning as a subject for literary criticism.

Culture does not exist independently of its concepts, either. Think of the Renaissance that once existed for Burckhardt or Symonds: an age when man's spiritual individuality was realized; when antiquity was re-born; and when the beauty of nature was discovered. In twentieth-century concepts, far more stress is placed on economic and socio-political factors. Digesting these various Renaissance, Greenblatt seems to try for a moderate if not conservative temperance. He goes back, for example, to Burckhardt's idea of the state as a work of artifice (*Kunstwerk*), and of the individual as a comparable work.

But these ideas are given a new twist by concentrating on motives of power. Even by contemporary standards this is carried quite far. The characteristically Renaissance activity, "self-fashioning", is for Green-

blatt primarily a matter of power. It was characteristic also to control that. But the concealments can be systematically stripped away, until each literary passage reveals an ideology of power; until every individual motive is seen to be based on its lack or its pursuit or its exertion.

No more of Burckhardt's talk of merging upper and middle classes: in the revised Renaissance there is only exploitation. Greenblatt's chosen theme (or fiction) is not in itself implausible. The subject will bear such an emphasis. Indeed, culture is to this extent like nature, that it will yield an answer to any question put to it. When Greenblatt chooses to ask about exploitation of the Third World, Tudor culture must learn the new term and come as clean as it can.

These case studies of self-fashioning are concerned not merely with the growth of individualism, but with typical strategies adopted to defend or expand the self in political and social relations. The early chapters have to do with crises of authority and with the "desacramentalization" of church and state: a scene in which "the role of the mind... in the creation of oppressive institutions" began to be grasped. More and Tyndale are portrayed as searching for new bases of control, but dying in the attempt. A case is made for *Utopia* as self-criticism: as an expression of More's longing to cancel his own identity. These chapters make some interesting observations about the comparative externality of early Protestant attitudes, for example.

One hesitates, however, at the sociological recapitulation of these emotions "deeply embedded in the nation's social and psychological character". It is doubtless true of More, Tyndale and Wyatt that "taken together, they may be said to enact the momentous ideological shift in early modern England from the consensus *fidellum* embodied in the universal Catholic church to the absolutist claims of the Book and the King". But surely that was only part of the change in self-fashioning. Various relations had their effect; and even changes in consciousness were in train, fostered over longer periods than the political clock measures. Greenblatt's method is hardly calculated to explore these. Sensitive as he is to variations in authenticity or

identity, he frankly uses his exemplary people to illustrate "patterns" already known, more or less, to social historians. Tyndale's successive voluntary exiles "signal a pattern of rejections in Tyndale's life... Man must live outside the institution".

Professor Greenblatt avoids the extreme forms of psycho-history; he several times draws back from psychoanalytic explanation that might have deepened his enquiry. Nevertheless the connections he follows are emotional rather than intellectual. This leads him to notice similarities rather than differences between his subjects. Even More and Tyndale, who are repeatedly contrasted, in the end exhibit "significant similarities".

From men of religion and affairs, who wrote an illocutionary literature of ideas, Greenblatt turns to poets. He writes with some subtlety on the range of interests perfectly. Wyatt the diplomatist can be shown at the court of Charles V. literally enacting the ceremonies of the power game. And perhaps he really felt a close analogy between diplomacy and trade and love, as his age conceived them: "it posited a severely limited substance (power or wealth) and hence assumed that the gain of one party is inevitably the loss of the other".

Again, there is plausibility in the idea that personally embodied power dominated the court of Henry VIII. This has implications for Henrician literature. Greenblatt carries conviction when he affirms the dangerous reality of Wyatt's songs - unnecessarily, so far as C. S. Lewis is concerned, who called them not "light-hearted" but "passionate", which is almost the opposite. Up to a point, it makes sense to think of the songs as moves in a deadly competitive love game "in which idealism and cynicism, aggression and vulnerability, self-revelation and hypocrisy are tensely conjoined". Ambiguity would be a *sine qua non*. And perhaps Wyatt's ambassadorial experience intensified his sensitivity to literary reality. (But why not the other way round, as Tudor educationalists have to have expected?) Raymond Southall's point that some of Wyatt's poems may not be love poems in the ordinary sense is not taken up.

Wyatt's is a suitable case for study. But the human heart in that

perilous court is not illuminated as much as we might hope. And it must be said that the literary information is grasped so loosely that one begins to have doubts about the approach in general. Take the discussion of "Who so list to hunt I know where is an hind;"

Who list her hunt I put him out of doubt,  
As well as I may spend his time in vain:  
And graven with Diamonds in letters plain  
There is written her fair neck round about:  
"Noli me tangere for Caesar's I am,  
And wild for to hold though I seem tame".

It is not that Greenblatt reads insensitively - his point about the opening's repetition renewing the hunt, for example, is well taken - but rather that he ignores problems calling for sensitivity in a critic of the poem. For him it is simply a "translation" of Petrarch's *Una candida cervo* (no fussing about Romanello or the Petrarchan commentators: all the criticism of Patricia Thomson and the rest goes for nothing). And there is not the slightest hint that the collared hind had literary predecessors in Pliny, Plutarch, Valerius Maximus, Solinus, Gaguinus (apropos of Charles VI) and Boccaccio, to say nothing of the folk-legendary herds gathered in Michael Bath's learned articles. Greenblatt presents the poem as capturing a passage from Petrarch's mystical ethos (in which "nessum mi tocchi" was meant devoutly) and lowering it to a corrupt use of power. Wyatt, he thinks, not Wyatt's speaker, is trying to disavow himself from Anne Boleyn. Nowhere does he consider what the convention of the amorous hunt in literature might signify.

Greenblatt finds in the last line "a complex reversal of expectations: from the point of view of the hunter it should be the lameness rather than the wildness of the hind that is the disabling surprise." Much is built on this, which it would be cruel to quote. For the line means precisely the opposite of what Greenblatt supposes. There is no true paradox. There is no discrepancy, even, between the collar's Latin and English parts, which are graven, after all, as a single inscription. The sole oddity disappears as soon as we restore the words to their matrix in literary convention, by adding a crucial piece of information. This is that wildness in such contexts regularly meant chastity, whereas lameness meant submission to a lover's will. (It is not such a difficult idea: a tame animal is more readily handled.) Decades later, in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, the merchant could still say to his daughter Luce, after her elopement with Jasper, "Come your ways minion, I'll provide a case! For you, you're grow so tame" (III.iii.114-15). Similarly in Willoughby's *Avila* "Though coy, [reserved] at first she seem and wild...". Or Wyatt himself: "I have seen them gentle tame and meek/ That now are wild and do not remember."

The detail matters. It allows us to see Wyatt's poem as a complementary one. Despite any surface appearance the hint may show of approachability, it is really wild (shy) and faithful to Caesar. So respectful is the speaker's hopeless admiration that the devout language is hardly inappropriate. This is sacrosanct flesh, yet untouched - like Romanello's *carie interna*. Where literature is highly conventional, it may be at its most informative, potentially. But if the conventions are disregarded it can also be at its most unintelligible.

Marlowe and Shakespeare offer many interesting patterns of power. But Greenblatt is seldom happy with drama, where he is tempted to treat characters as people, without reading them in terms of dramatic idioms. His approach is more fully tested with Spenser. Here he comes to grips with some of the criticism at

## Dance of Wind and Wash

Unlike myself, there are women who do not lie in bed every morning wondering: *shall I get up?* My mind roams capitals and anonymous villages of the world and everywhere I see them hanging out the most beautiful wash.

There is something about these women and their lines of flowing shapes and colours which prompt me from between sheets. I got dressed and head north into where I am - into the cold, clear light of the Pyrenees - to photograph their laundry.

I pass hundreds of lines, each one distinct. Some are fast and forthright, some relaxed hung between trees or just outside windows. The lines are their own horizons - humming cables transmitting the glare of light.

Clothes are held to the lines by brown or coloured pegs - blusas and blouses, blankets twisting into knots, blue and pink striped sheets puffing into ephrakers, nyons dancing, shoes hanging disconsolately by their laces.

The sound of these threaded syllables awaying like white shadows, a played deck of cards or arching dolphins comforts me. I'm haunted as much by the clothes as by bits of coastline glimpsed between folds of bath towels.

I'm haunted too by your presence which hangs out in my clothes, on my lines and whose ghostly (and perhaps more substantial) swaying - despite what seems a waste of lonely years - I'm only now beginning to name.

Nuala Archer



least, although with mixed results. To some, indeed, his interpretation of the Bower of Bliss will no doubt discredit his way of using literature. For he subtly moulds the story (Acacia was not "tightly" bound, for example), and slight distinctions laboriously achieved by modern critics (who have after all studied Acacia's allegorical significance fairly extensively). Greenblatt prefers the broad terms of the Romantics: Acacia offers "not simply sexual pleasure... but self-abandonment... the end of all quests." Hence Guyon's destruction of her Bower is a taking of power; he purchases his more civilized self at the cost of a "painful sexual renunciation." In this myth of modern self-control, "excess" is defined not by some inherent imbalance or impropriety, but by... the exercise of restraining power." In a word, the destruction of the Bower means repression.

Spenser might protest that divine law is what defines excess. But Greenblatt seems not much interested in Spenser's meaning. For Spenser loved power, and would have deluded himself about it. Fortunately there are other sources of meaning. Freud compared civilization's behaviour towards sexuality with that of the colonial powers to subject populations; so that the destruc-

tion of the Bower is a symbol of colonialism. Or, in a sense it is. Greenblatt offers "three reiterations by the culture of important elements by the destruction of the Bower."

These are not exactly offered as meanings, but as implementations of the sociological programme. They "incorporate the work of art into the texture of a particular pattern of life." Only, the pattern is not a Renaissance one. It is a familiar twentieth-century pattern: a pattern we are now conditioned to see. The nature that Burkhardt had Renaissance men admiring, Greenblatt has them destroying.

To incorporate Guyon's spoliation into real life, the method is to collect "essential elements" that it shared with actual enterprises of its time. This the voyage of approach, the idleness of the Bower, the "pointlessness" of its life: all are ingeniously matched with the New World of the travel books. Some essential elements, however, prove a little recalcitrant. Early voyagers described an artless, not an awful world. And cannibalism and incest can only be detected at the Bower (in Acacia's sucking of Verdant's spirit "through

## A liking for lucre

By George Watson

JOHN McVEAGH:  
Trade-fair Merchants  
The Portrayal of the Capitalist in Literature  
221pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.  
£11.95.  
0 7100 0729 9

Capitalism is not much loved by literary intellectuals, at least as a theory. It is a symptom of their distaste that they should use the word at all: what economic system, after all, does not depend on the control and management of capital? Nobody who admires a competitive economic system based on the quest for private wealth would call it that; and in the United States, where the system is widely admired, the word is seldom heard outside universities. John McVeagh, a lecturer in the New University of Ulster, uses the word plentifully in his familiar if tendentious sense, and has been content to write a book that makes a good many usual assumptions, like "the violent replacement of feudalism by a capitalist social order" that allegedly occurred in sixteenth-century England. But then the whole book has such a well-worn air about it, seemingly undisturbed by recent and subversive historical speculation, that it comes as a surprise to find that end-notes and bibliography contain a wide and full-ranging reference to recent scholarship, both literary and historical.

The book is unwaveringly a survey. Beginning with Langland, who put Lady Lucre into *Piers Plowman* to disparage fraudulent gain rather than gain as such - a sensible view, surely, for Langland to take - McVeagh conducts the reader down a long tunnel lined by such predictable figures as Defoe, Pope and Carlyle, until he arrives at the present. Much of the prose has the breathless air of something written off the top of the head, and McVeagh, strenuously unpolemical, almost never engages with the views of the scholars he cites in his long sentences. But it is still nice to see Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday* taken seriously, as seriously it has been taken at the National Theatre; and interesting to hear it suggested that Shakespeare's Antonio,

considered as a merchant of Venice, was to stand-offish to "last a month in the demanding and demeaning real business world." "De-meaning", however, shows how little McVeagh is reconciled to his subject. Even his title, which is taken from a dazzling sonnet in Spenser's *Amoretti*, does not stir him:

Ye trade-fair merchants, that with  
Do seek most precious things to  
make your gain...

Merchants remain of remote, anthropological interest to him, though there must be one or two at the end of his street. If he is aware that others have found romance in commerce, it is not an intuition he ever looks ready to share. He reminds one of fashionable folk a hundred years ago, murmuring deprecatingly: "In trade, my dear..."

Nowadays it is a matter of understandable concern, in the inner corridors of the Department of Education and Science, that a literary education should foster so easy a disdain for the economic system that a trading nation like Britain needs in order to flourish and even to survive. The academic paradox here is acute. Universities, not least their literary departments, are sustained on the taxes levied from the trade-fair merchants for whom McVeagh feels so lofty a distaste. He needs them more, at a guess, than they need him. But there is a less familiar point to be made here: that art, too, is commerce. Authors write to sell. A poem, play or novel is a commodity; not solely that, but still emphatically that. McVeagh speaks remotely of Smollett's interest in the commodification of literature, but he is nowhere concerned with literature as a commodity in itself. Oddly enough, hardly any literary historian is. And yet such great artists as Shakespeare and Dickens both wrote with an eye to profit, and in the event their works proved highly profitable. George Eliot's literary accounts are impressive evidence, together with her correspondence, that great minds like big money. An author is himself a trade-fair merchant, and needs to be. Great art is saleable. And when his long sentences. But it is still nice to see Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday* taken seriously, as seriously it has been taken at the National Theatre; and interesting to hear it suggested that Shakespeare's Antonio,

## The sceptical scene

By Jean Wilson

SUKANTA CHAUDHURI:  
Infirm Glory  
Shakespeare and the Renaissance  
Image of Man  
221pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford  
University Press. £12.50.  
0 19 812801 0

In this well-written and illuminating book, Sukanta Chaudhuri seeks to relate Shakespeare's writing to the philosophical scepticism expressed by other contemporary writers. After surveys of scepticism as manifested in Corneille's *Agrippa*, Rabelais and Montaigne, he traces it in the works of the neo-platonists Nicholas of Cusa, Ficino and Pico; the Humanists Erasmus, Colet and More; and the theologians, starting with Aquinas and other Scholastics, and going on to the Protestants, principally Luther and Calvin. A long chapter examines manifestations of scepticism in some works of Sidney, Sir John Davies, Phineas Fletcher, Raleigh, Greville, Bacon, Burton, Spenser and Donne, and then the latter half of the book applies the insights of the previous chapters to Marlowe and to both Parts of *Henry IV*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and to the Last Plays. An epilogue looks forward to Milton.

Professor Chaudhuri apologizes in several places for the extent of his reiteration of what may be to many of his readers familiar material, but this is

in fact one of the most valuable aspects of his book. In its survey of an important element of Renaissance thought, and its firm and humane concentration on the central figures in the plays with which it deals, it provides an admirable example of the book which may profitably be given to undergraduates: one which places Shakespeare firmly in the context of his age, and yet pays close and scholarly attention to individual texts; one which, and which takes due notice of the works of other scholars.

The book isn't strikingly original, and there are many points over which one would wish to take issue with the author (and with OUP - it is clumsy to put translated quotations in the text and the originals in footnotes; why not include both in the text?). Chaudhuri over-simplifies Spenser; ignores the fact that Britomart's ancestress is at least as important as Britomart the virgin; under-values Marlowe's *Edward II*, and is shaky on *Fasti*; and generalizes Ophelia (he has indeed a tendency to sentimentalize Shakespeare, perhaps due in fact to his character-oriented approach) and maintains that Ariel obeyed Sycorax (he didn't - that was why she stuck him in a pine tree). But it is scholarly and a most enjoyable read.

An enlarged edition of A. M. Nagler's 1958 study, *Shakespeare's Stage*, has recently been published in paperback form (157pp, £3.95). In it, the author examines the working environment of Shakespeare and his fellow-dramatists,

## Bringing down the Luftwaffe

By Ronald Lewin

MATTHEW COOPER:  
The German Air Force 1933-1945  
An Anatomy of Failure.  
406pp. Jane's. £12.95.  
0 531 03733 9

I was only once dive-bombed directly by a Stuka. It could hardly miss the target - our gun-position on a bare ridge in the North African desert. The plummet's descent was certainly disagreeable, as it must have been for those in London who saw a flying-bomb cut out and then swoop unreluctantly down on them. But when the smoke had thinned and the sand settled, it was evident that no significant damage had been done - except, alas, to the nerves of my sergeant-major. The event was no more than a little local disturbance, but it serves as a symbol not only of the Stuka's history but also of the whole abortive story of the Luftwaffe as it emerges from Matthew Cooper's extremely instructive analysis.

For the Luftwaffe itself, like the dive-bombing Ju 87, was designed specifically as a weapon of shock: the quintessential expression - beyond even Panzers and U-boats - of the Hitlerian Weltanschauung which, in the Führer's own words, maintained that "what the aristocratic basic idea of Nature desires is the victory of the strong and the annihilation of the weak or the role of ditional subjection". Not only was the tool adapted technically to this end; the officers and men of the Luftwaffe seemed to Hitler to be imbued, ideologically, with a far purer strain of Nazism than was to be found in the distracted army and navy or even, for a variety of reasons, in the combat divisions formed by Himmler and the praetorian guard of the SS. In the prisoner-of-war cages it was always the Luftwaffe pilots, one found, who were contemptuously arrogant.

Yet the key phrase in Hitler's definition of Nature's purpose is "the annihilation of the weak". As Sebastian Haffner pointed out in his lucid study *The Meaning Of Hitler* (1979), all of his successes, whether political or military, were in fact achieved against weak opposition, whereas his assaults tended to crumble when they met a strong and dynamic resistance. So it was with the Stuka. In 1938, Mr Cooper notes, the General Staff of the Luftwaffe declared that "the emphasis in offensive bombardment has clearly shifted from area to pin-point bombardment", for which the Ju 87 was the designated instrument. Yet by August 1942, when my gun-position was worked over, the Stuka was already virtually obsolete: indeed, its employment two years earlier in the Battle of Britain was so disastrous that its squadrons had to be withheld. The shock-effect, so vicious when directed against feeble or demoralized troops in Poland, or during the Battle of France, or in Russia during the early days, was easily dissipated by resolute anti-aircraft fire from the ground or by efficient fighters in the sky. This neutralization of the Luftwaffe's main strike-weapon supplies a paradigm for the catastrophic failure of the Luftwaffe itself.

More detached and more comprehensive than David Irving's *The Rise and Fall of the Luftwaffe* (which pivots on the career of Field Marshal Milch), and more sedate in style than his own buoyant study of the German Army, Matthew Cooper's book is doubly welcome. First, because its cool maturity marks a genuine development in the capacity of a military student who can carry lightly the weight of a major theme, and secondly because in spite of all it might have reminded us of our own imperfect record. Long ago, in his official history of *The Luftwaffe Development of Weapons*, M. M. Postle described the famous Mosquito as "an aircraft... completely free from official inspiration" and showed how the Hurricane, the Spitfire and the Lancaster were less the children of Whitehall and the Air Staff than of private initiatives within

planning errors, conflicting personalities, material shortages, mere corruption and the enemy's mounting superiority all played their part, but simple because in the end the blame - in Mr Cooper's final words - "lies with the Luftwaffe high command, whose mode of operations disgraced its profession of arms, and, above all, with Hitler, Führer and Supreme Commander".

It was Hitler who handed over the air to Göring - corpulent, intolerant, incompetent, self-indulgent Göring: Göring who destroyed the virtual certainty of victory for the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain by inept tactical and strategic decisions; Göring who subsequently opted out, to enjoy the lush pleasures of Karinhall while Udet, the Chief of the Technical Office, and Jeschonnek, the Chief of his General Staff, huddled and bungled until each of them committed suicide. Göring the *soi-disant* leader who alienated his pilots by a vulgarity of life-style and, least worthy of all, by his bitter recriminations and baseless accusations of cowardice. It was Hitler who so failed to mobilize and integrate the German war-economy that it was only when Speer took charge, far too late, that "the German miracle" occurred and planes for the Luftwaffe began to be produced at a rate wholly unexpected by the Allies. It was Hitler, above all, who embarked on campaigns in which the role of the Luftwaffe would be critical, but with an air force too small for it to be able to cope and, in any case, equipped with inadequate planes.

British historians tend to be chauvinistic when they look at the Luftwaffe, mesmerized by Fighter Command's heroic summer in 1940 and the various operations around what became Mare Nostrum, the Mediterranean. But Mr Cooper is surely right in devoting close attention to the Russian campaign and identifying this - apart from the day-battles over Germany in 1944 - as the Luftwaffe's real area of martyrdom. If Milch, with more intuition than Hitler, diminished for his crews the agonies of that first drive into winter by ordering in advance appropriate clothing, cold-weather lubricants, etc., nothing could preserve them from the consequences once Moscow had survived and Hitler's ruthless idiosyncrasy as a warlord prevailed. The Luftwaffe, as Cooper demonstrates, was rarely powerful enough to achieve anything like superiority on more than one front. As Hitler swings his *schwerpunkt* now here, now there, we see his air force switched from A to B, inevitably denuding all but the front of immediate concern, and thus enabling the Russians elsewhere to rest, regroup, and reinforce their thriving squadrons. Pinned to the battlefield, the Luftwaffe was incapable of the strategic interdiction attained by attacking installations and communications far behind the lines. Where, anyway, was the heavy long-range aircraft - the He 177 whose sorry production record is well described, or the phantom "B Bomber", a fast high-performance load-carrier which was projected in 1939 but abandoned in 1943?

That acute analyst of the American politico-military complex, James Fallows, has coined the phrase "the culture of procurement" to describe the atmosphere of blind optimism, excessive elaboration of equipment, wrong diagnoses and pervasive wheeling and dealing which characterizes his country's military aircraft industry. In Hitler's Germany (his culture was even more corrupt and, put simply, sterile. Matthew Cooper is a merciless chronicler of its deficiencies. In fairness, however, he might have reminded us of our own imperfect record. Long ago, in his official history of *The Luftwaffe Development of Weapons*, M. M. Postle described the famous Mosquito as "an aircraft... completely free from official inspiration" and showed how the Hurricane, the Spitfire and the Lancaster were less the children of Whitehall and the Air Staff than of private initiatives within

firms like Hawker and A. V. Roe. (Avro were refused the raw materials for the first prototype of the matchless Lancaster.) Even the American Mustang, that astonishing long-distance fighter which cleared the German skies of opposition in 1944, only emerged after much internecine conflict and incomprehension. Still, all these and other aircraft *did* emerge, to provide the Allies with a balanced force that the Nazi culture of procurement denied to the unfortunate Luftwaffe.

Explicit and exact in so many other ways, Mr Cooper may reasonably be faulted for not examining with any penetration the hidden constraint which perhaps affected the Luftwaffe most grievously. This was the range and quality of Allied intelligence, whether scientific or cryptanalytical. Ultra is hardly mentioned, yet the people at Bletchley Park were able to read the Luftwaffe's high-grade signals in the Enigma cipher more or less continuously, and quickly, from 1940 onwards. Operational plans, the movement and strength and location of units, command structures, improvements and deficiencies in equipment and so

on were thus abundantly disclosed. The Allied, and particularly the American, command of the Japanese diplomatic cipher meant that a tremendous amount of information, notably about the German development of jet-fighters, was acquired from the highly technical reports transmitted by radio to Tokyo from the Japanese Embassy in Berlin. To a degree that has still not been elucidated the staff of the "Y Service" provided an invaluable back-up by its ability to intercept and break the Luftwaffe's lower-grade codes and, with increasing sophistication, to listen in to the actual voice-communications of the pilots - as the late Aileen Clayton, a senior officer in the Service, so vividly explained in *The Enemy Is Listening*. We might also have been told more about the scientific attack, especially on the technology which upheld the Luftwaffe - its central nervous system, for example, which ramified through the radar chains in North-West Europe and the Mediterranean. And what, one might ask, were the Russians doing in these fields?

The contrast which Cooper so clearly draws between corruption,

disharmony and inefficiency at the centre and the dedication of the air-crews (of whom 70,000 were killed and 25,000 wounded) makes his book in some sense a therapy, and this is just. However rebarbative their ideology, we can recognize at this distance the courage of men who flew to the support of doomed Stalingrad or guided those lumbering bastards, the Me 323 six-engined *Gigants*, across the sea to predictable destruction during the last days in North Africa. The old Luftwaffe braggadocio has a certain pathos when it is seen against the back-cloth (re-drawn by Mr Cooper) which was sketched in 1944 by its Commander of Research Establishments, Colonel Petersen. "Were one to pen a faithful account, an objective history of the Luftwaffe's technical development since 1934, then any outsider today - or better, our descendants - would take the whole thing as satire, dreamed up by some diseased imagination. Who could seriously believe that in real life there would be so much inadequacy, bungling, enclaves, misplaced power, lack of appreciation of the truth and overlooking of intelligent ideas?"

## Ministerial methods

By Michael Howard

DOUGLAS KINNARD:  
The Secretary of Defense  
252pp. University Press of Kentucky.  
\$10.00.  
0 1831 1434 9

IAN F. W. BECKETT and JOHN GOOCH (editors):  
Politicians and Defence  
Studies in the Formulation of British Defence Policy  
224pp. Manchester University Press.  
£16.50.  
0 7190 0818 2

Historians can seldom help statesmen to solve their problems, but they can often comfort them by showing that their difficulties are not unprecedented, much less unique. Patterns of behaviour cut across cultural barriers and persist through centuries of social, political and technological change. There can seldom have been a regime, in this country or anywhere else, in which the minister responsible for managing the economy and those responsible for maintenance of defence forces have not found themselves natural adversaries. Occasionally a statement of outstanding ability - a Colbert, a McNamara - may seem briefly to reconcile the two opposites, but the synthesis seldom holds for long. In spite of all that Marxists may say about the dependence of capitalist economies on military expenditure, treasury officials are usually the best allies of those in all countries who are working for universal disarmament.

But studies of ministers for defence are not a very satisfactory way of examining the changes and continuities in national defence policy. To quote the foreword, as Ian F. W. Beckett and John Gooch state in their introduction to their book, that "the situations of a Victorian and a modern politician charged with defence responsibilities remain in essence the same", and that "a modern minister such as Healey faced a very similar situation to that confronting Grey or Cardwell in seeking to reconcile competing commitments with limited resources". But the machinery for formulating and implementing defence policy, the nature of the problems confronting governments and the balance of personalities within administrations may differ so fundamentally that the roles of these individuals in shaping events are simply not comparable. Even within a single country such as the United

States over a period of only thirty years the situation may vary so greatly that a study of successive Defense Secretaries, though possessing this intrinsic interest of any series of bureaucratic biographies (Campbell's *Lives of the Lord Chancellors* comes to mind) provides little more than raw material for a study of defence-policy formulation.

This is Douglas Kinnard's problem. Some of the figures that he deals with in his study of Defense Secretaries from Forrestal to Schlesinger were important, and some were not, and those who were important were so in very different ways. Forrestal was not a key figure in the Truman administration, and he was destroyed by his inability to impose a common policy on three quarrelsome and independent Services. "Engine Charlie" Wilson confined himself to minor management functions under a President who was his own Defense Secretary. For McNamara the formulation of strategy and the administration of the Services were different aspects of a single managerial problem to be solved by the same techniques; though those techniques took remarkably little account of what soldiers actually had to do. Laird was a skilful executor of a policy formulated by President Nixon but had to fight hard to preserve any degree of independence from the omnivorous Dr. Kissinger. Schlesinger formulated broad lines of strategic policy and left managerial details to others. Some Secretaries had intrusive Presidents, and some passive ones, some cooperative Congresses, and some hostile, some were supported by a militant public opinion and some shackled by a pacific one. Professor Kinnard shows, in short, how the work of the Secretary has varied with the talents of the incumbent; and though he provides no major new insights into a topic that does not lend itself to analysis, he has given us a useful and unpretentious guide to one of the variables in an ever-shifting scene.

Beckett and Gooch have a more difficult task, partly because they have to cover more ground, partly because they have to manage a team of eight authors. A good, clear introduction pulls all the threads together. The purposes for which the "grand forces exist" and their capacity to carry out Britain's diplomatic and treaty commitments; the effectiveness with which professional advice can be marshalled to guide and inform ministerial decisions; the place of the ministry in the Cabinet and the relationship of its civil head with the Prime Minister of

the day"; these, they rightly point out, provide "the overall parameters" within which defence policy must always be formulated. But parameters or not, parameters, there is a huge gulf between, on the one hand, the position of an Arnold Forster or a Horé Belisha (expertly treated here by Ian Beckett and by Brian Bond) who were concerned with the management of a single Service while broad issues of defence policy were settled largely over their heads; and that, on the other, a Duncan Sandys or a Denis Healey (dealt with by Colin Gordan and Peter Naylor), powerful ministers assigned and given full backing by their premiers to formulate defence policy in the broadest sense and to bring all three Services into line. And a yet greater gap divides the task of a Grey and a Cardwell in organizing the defence of a huge Empire on a financial shoe-string, and that of a Kitchenier charged, as Peter Simkins ably shows, with channelling the unbounded enthusiasm of a nation into a single huge Continental army.

Having produced several works in this genre, this reviewer knows very well the problems that confront an editor, and can appreciate the skill with which Beckett and Gooch have done their work. The contributors have obviously all been made aware of the "overall parameters", and do what they can to relate their studies to them. But in the last resort they are, all historians more interested in their particular subject than in the general problem; and quite frankly the really excellent studies by Hew Strachan on Lord Grey, the true father of "Imperial Defence", and by Anthony Bruce on Lord Cardwell will be of greater interest to students of Victorian England than to defence analysts. For the latter, however, Professor Naylor's essay on Denis Healey will be a quite special treat. It is not often that toads have the chance to chart quite so elegantly the course of the harrow that has over-run them.

In the second edition of *The Armed Forces of the USSR* (446pp. Arms and Armour Press. £12.95. 0 85868 287 9), which has recently been published, Harriet F. Scott and William F. Scott analyze the post-war development of the Soviet military, looking at the High Command, each of the five services, combat formations, and supporting agencies, and give a comprehensive account of the Soviet military-industrial complex, military training of Soviet youth, military manpower, mobilization, and the Soviet officer corps.

مكتبة الأص



## Among the ambiguities

By Clive Hart

ROLAND McHUGH:  
*The Finnegans Wake Experience*  
123pp. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, £7 (paperback, £3.50).  
0 7165 0047 4

"James Joyce is a fashionable writer and his last book, *Finnegans Wake*, is frequently named in awe by all kinds of literati." The flat tone of the opening sentence threatens the tedium of the routine class paper. Do not be misled: this is an altogether delightful book, witty, perceptive, informative, and in its fashion well written.

Its fashion is not that of professional criticism. While *Ulysses* continues to engage the attention of the finest students of literature, few critics of stature seem attracted these days by *Finnegans Wake*. Although excellent work on it continues to appear, most is produced by writers with other kinds of backgrounds, often in the sciences. A biologist with a special interest in grasshoppers, Roland McHugh brings to *Finnegans Wake*, on which he has published extensively, a combination of intuitive sympathy, common-sense, and a willingness to work hard before expecting results. He is not in the least concerned to bring his studies of Joyce into line with received literary opinion, in which he has no interest.

*The Finnegans Wake Experience* might almost be subtitled "the autobiography of a Joyce enthusiast". With an engaging willingness to expose his ignorance, both past and present ("the name of Vico was unknown to me, but I decided that the only sensible course was to look at the philosophy shelves..."), McHugh describes his own learning process since the middle 1960s, in the beginning he not only avoided all contact with secondary sources, but adopted a remarkably self-disciplined method of reading:

My technique was slightly fanatical. I was so anxious to capture the undistorted experience that on reaching page 29, where the first chapter ends, I tied a thread round the remaining pages to prevent my accidentally looking ahead. Every few months there would be a solemn undoing of the thread: I

would read a new chapter and then tie up the remaining ones. It took two and a half years to reach the end of FW.

When he felt ready to do so, he began to read published criticism and to discuss *Finnegans Wake* with other Joyceans. With succinctness and candour he gives a generally chronological account of these experiences of books and individuals. The result is an acute if also somewhat truncated critique of *Finnegans Wake* studies, with a special emphasis on the past two decades.

Properly dismissive of the free-associationists, the sexualizing charlatans who have not read beyond page 8, and the old-fashioned seekers after narrative, McHugh also ignores a number of aggressively modernist critics who have attempted to recast Joyce as an intellectual, a theorizer, a destroyer rather than a nourishing creator. He respects only those who, by paying close, unprejudiced attention to the text, are prepared to get to know it intimately, and he understands that the

magic of *Finnegans Wake* is evoked by simple means, the sensitive play of juxtaposition, antithesis, and equilibrium.

Concerned above all with texture and structure (though not in the "structuralist" sense), McHugh stresses the interrelationship of parts, both microcosmic and macrocosmic. He adopts a sane approach to the problem created by the many textual corruptions, leaving his scientific bias with a clear awareness of the fallibility of the transmission process, the quickness of authorial decision and counter-decision, and the uncertain status of the text which Joyce received, celebrated on his birthday, and tacitly approved.

I suspect that Joyce would frequently observe some secondary interpretation or enrichment resulting from the ambiguity of a misprint. Although the effect might be to damage the syntax or coherence of the primary level, he might well opt for leaving it, such was his greed for multiplicity of meanings. Who are we to challenge such decisions?

The scholar is invited to use his judgment: "An unreasonable gloss - say one that depends on a statement that Joyce misread his own handwriting - ought not to be forced down the reader's throat. Most of the allusions in FW are reasonable." In recent years McHugh has been among the foremost of Joyce's reasonable interpreters.

Now living permanently in Ireland, McHugh has turned his attention once again to etymology. Although promising to return one day to Joyce, and to do so with increased zest, he has decided that "for the present I'm giving *Finnegans Wake* a rest". While waiting, he hopes to see a further growth of the acceptance of Joyce in Ireland, a change of attitude which he expresses through an analogy which Joyce would surely have found to his taste:

Nineteenth-century guidebooks to Ireland tend to glorify such localities as Killarney, but the Burren is dismissed as a dreary mass of infertile stone. Modern guidebooks eulogize its landscape as amongst the most entralling in the country. In the same way we will eventually see *Ulysses* and *FW* accepted as natural Irish phenomena, albeit a little harsh on the body.



The Joyce centenary next year will be marked by a number of conferences, exhibitions, entertainments and other events, news of some of which is contained in the current number of the James Joyce Broad-sheet (available from the James Joyce Centre, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, price £1). A commemorative stamp is planned, and among the designs submitted is this one by Michael Klemm, reproduced in the Broad-sheet. Klemm has also designed Joycean T-shirts.

## In the appropriate order

By Richard Brown

ROY K. GOTTFRIED:  
*The Art of Joyce's Syntax in 'Ulysses'*  
191pp. Macmillan. £12.  
0 333 30648 1

Surprising as it may seem, there have been precious few full-frontal enquiries into Joyce's language. Of course, scarcely a book on Joyce goes by without some discussion, or even theory, of the language, but, whether because of our current uncertainty in the whole question of how we should look at language in literature, or because of the particular difficulties of Joyce, or just because no one has quite yet seen their way to doing it, nothing has appeared that one would call anywhere near definitive.

This new book, then, by Roy K. Gottfried, entitled *The Art of Joyce's Syntax in 'Ulysses'*, promises a great deal. The study is sensibly limited to *Ulysses*, where Joyce's linguistic experiment reached its height, and does not risk the accusations of eccentricity that threaten the student of *Finnegans Wake*. And there is a justice in the wording of the title: it is "syntax" and especially in "syntax" that seems, for once, to be the nail hit square upon its head.

Joyce, after all, when asked by Frank Budgen whether a whole day's work was worth it, replied that it was, if it was worth it.

sex was passed in searching for the most just, replied (and Gottfried uses the remark as his epigraph):

"No, I have the words already. What I am seeking is the perfect order of words in the sentence. There is an order in every way appropriate."

This is an often-quoted passage but one whose lead is rarely followed up. Gottfried is to be congratulated for having done so and for having brought up for discussion a number of those sentences (as much as they are sentences) which keep the clockwork of the greatest prose work of the century running true.

Consider, for example, Bloom's discomfiting at Stephen in "Ithaca": "Which example did he address to induce Stephen to deduce... or his thoughts on Molly's telephantic dress with the braided fringe." In the "Leontineans" episode, "The old man like it because I explained my ankle first day she wore choir picnic at the Supper." Clearly syntax is at issue here and these examples (among others of the same form which he uses and many others of many more types which he doesn't) are discussed by Gottfried as instances of, in the first place, Joyce's verbal patterning and, in the second, his freedom from syntactic restraint.

Before all the wealth of his subject, though, Gottfried seems to lose his head. The terms he uses to classify Joyce's syntactic effects - all are explained as kinds of order or as kinds of patterns - are too broad and too vague; his critical language is flaccid;

his references to Joyce's other works and to Joyce criticism too infrequent; and his incorporation of linguistic theory - Benjamin Lee Whorf and Wittgenstein are the two enlisted - is far too wanton and imprecise to be of much value.

His shortcomings are most evident in the chapter where he deals with those bits of *Ulysses* where the sentence breaks off unfinished. "Hate company when you" thinks Bloom, for instance, as an unwelcome meeting interrupts the examination of his clandestine letter from Martha Clifford. A tension between this unfinishedness and normal sentence order can of course be felt, but Gottfried blows the whole thing out of proportion, calling his chapter "Potential Order as Entelechy", and entering into a prolonged discussion of Joyce's Aristotelianism which (though not altogether uninteresting in itself) has nothing whatsoever to do with the unfinished sentences at hand.

Somewhere beneath his too easy philosophizing there is the potential for a good book, and it seems closest to the surface in the penultimate chapter, which extends beyond the three types of Joyce's syntax I have quoted and makes a more genuine attempt to come to terms with the range of emotional effects that Joyce achieves through his uniquely arranged syntax. But on this surface is an attempt to be profound when straightforwardness would do much better.

## Sapphic bliss

By Keith Walker

LILLIAN FADERMAN:  
*Surpassing the Love of Men*  
Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present  
496pp. Junction Books. £14.50 (paperback, £5.95).  
0 86245 028 4

Long ago, some women loved other women, lived with them, slept with them, and wrote them letters of passionate intensity. Society viewed the relationship benignly, if the women concerned were of a sufficiently high social class. Then came Krafft-Ebing and Freud, attaching labels. Women who loved women became "lesbians" and as ashamed. Society turned nasty and editors began to excise the passionate bits from their letters.

Lillian Faderman stumbled over this not startlingly original version of events when she was reading Emily Dickinson's love poems and letters to Sue Gilbert, and noticed that Dickinson showed no "guilt" and moreover that her niece, editing the letters early in this century, felt obliged to bowdlerize them. (This has always been the way of relatives, and until very recently of scholars.) With a terrible earnestness she decided to investigate the friendships of women, and this awesomely diligent work is the result.

It begins with a quick romp through works of the Renaissance which contains references to lesbians (the word, and some would say, the concept, wasn't invented till the nineteenth century) or lesbian behaviour, like Sidney's *Arcadia* Book 2, or Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* 25, but ignoring the comic reworking of this passage in *Faerie Queene* 3.1 which Faderman seems not to have come across. (Later she quotes a passage from Thomas Lodge's *Rosalinde*, apparently unaware that *Rosalinde* is Shakespeare's main source for *As You Like It*, a play which would have provided her with much useful, if complex, data.)

Faderman's first extended treatment of a work of literature is of Diderot's *La Religieuse*. Diderot's treatment of lesbianism is said to be "infamous", not "clinically correct and sympathetic", as critics have claimed. Without anything so vulgar as a reference to Diderot's text, or a supporting argument, Faderman knows that this is so, because Diderot was worried that his mistress Sophie Voland might be a lesbian (it may well be true that he was worried, but it's not relevant), and because he is "anti-feminist", a statement that is meaningless unless set in the context of general attitudes to women in eighteenth-century France. Later *Pamela* and *Clarissa* are "all about" the "game" of the sexes where men chase women for

the pleasure of seducing them and affecting their ruin. That's one way of looking at Richardson, perhaps, though one might suggest that *Pamela* and especially *Clarissa* also show a deeply sympathetic concern with the harrowing plight of women, a matter that concerns Faderman elsewhere.

In general Faderman darts into works of literature for what she knows she will find there, snatches it, and emerges triumphant. She seems not to be acquainted with the works of Proust at first hand, having been persuaded by Djuna Barnes that Proust tells "lies" about lesbians. I suppose Barnes meant that Mme de Valpurgue is mannish and unsympathetic, and that other "jeunes filles" are flighty and frivolous. Well, that's how it often is, and Proust is not obliged to see lesbianism with Faderman as always "a bond that goes deeper than fleeting sexual passions".

Of Sarah Scott's *Millennium Hall* Faderman observes, with quiet satisfaction, "the major heterosexual relationship... the same-sex relationship... are invariably happy". This Miss Prism-like note is echoed in her account of Florence Converse's *Diana Victrix*: "the novel ends happily with Enid and Sylvia in domestic bliss and in the joy of their professional success". In Henry James's *The Bostonians* Ransom carries Verena off "but his victory is Pyrrhic, and James hints that the couple will be unhappy". But James's ending might be thought to show a greater understanding of how people - heterosexual or homosexual - experience life than Faderman's romantic fantasies. Her accounts of women's "romantic friendships" from Ponsoby and Eleanor Butler ("the ladies of Llangollen") onwards, resemble nothing so much as the collected plot summaries of pulp romantic fiction except here all the characters are women.

Is there a theme in the book? There are several strands. Faderman tells of the progress of women towards equality, the treatment of lesbians in fiction and in society, attitudes towards lesbianism, the rise of the feminist movements, and so on. If there is a unifying factor it is the cosy glow engendered by the belief that lesbian relationships are finer, more enduring, and more satisfying than heterosexual ones. There's much to be said for this view, but here it exists only as an unargued assumption. You can see why Faderman disapproves of works like *The Well of Loneliness* which presents unhappy, guilty, and neurotic lesbians. She also disapproves of notions of "butch/femme" (her terms) polarities in lesbian relations, and seems to attribute bad faith to Freud for suggesting that they might exist.

The sixty pages of notes are not cut to the pages to which they refer. This means that a lot of astoundingly gathered, and sometimes interesting, information is buried.

## Domestic despond

By John Batchelor

RUTH PERRY:  
*Women, Letters, and the Novel*  
218pp. New York: AMS Press.  
0 404 18023 6

Ruth Perry writes with energy and anger about the relationship between the rise of the novel and the roles forced on women in the early eighteenth century. In a medieval society women had work and responsibilities, in their own right, educated single women could find careers in religion.

The growth of urban civilization had the effect of "phasing women out of the new economic structures" and by the eighteenth century women were "dispossessed of all meaningful activity save marrying and breeding". Intelligent women were victims of the "separate, private households which have always characterized urban life" and left with nothing to do. "Love in marriage was a sop to women who in life and literature were 'idealized, set apart'". The romantic love universally commended in the minor epistolary novels with which this study is concerned leads to marriages which are in effect institutionalized tyranny.

Ruth Perry seems to find the early epistolary novel a largely despicable art-form which reflects and endorses the marital conventions of a despotic civilization. It was a Richardson, she devotes more space to, who would have been interesting to have a full discussion of the one great novelist who wrote in the genre. It might also have forced Miss Perry to reconsider what was promised in the hall was performed on the field. "Bleeding son of Eli was a wild boar for ferocious" the son of Nwythion slew a hundred

## Survivors' Songs in Welsh Poetry

By Jon Stallworthy

This is a slightly edited version of the Gwyn Jones Lecture, given at University College, Cardiff earlier this year.

When I was honoured by the invitation to give this lecture I could not imagine what an expostulator might have to say that would be worth the attention of such an audience; until, remembering the days of my association with my favourite author, I again took up Gwyn Jones's *Oxford Book of Welsh Verse in English* and there - in Joseph Clancy's translation of *The Gododdin* - I found my text:

Of three hundred champions who charged on Catraeth,  
It is tragic, but one man came back...  
Of the comrades who went together,  
Tragic, but a single man returned.

This brought to mind another text, one perhaps known to Aneurin, author of *The Gododdin*:

And there came a messenger unto Job and said, The oxen were plowing,  
And the asses feeding beside them:  
And the Sabeans fell upon them,  
and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped to tell thee...

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped to tell thee.

Whether Aneurin intended it or not, the double coincidence of the three hundred - elsewhere in *The Gododdin* defined as three bands - and the one survivor, adds a tragic resonance to his poem. Not of course that this is a narrative, although a narrative emerges from the sequence of elegies with which the poet celebrates the exploits of those who fell at Catraeth. For Aneurin, as a man of rank, extols the officers and gentlemen but makes no mention of the "other ranks", the infantry, whom scholars assume to have accompanied each mounted knight. He extols them not as an obsequist or war-correspondent, but as kinsman and friend:

In a shining array they fed together round the wine-vessel. My heart has become full of grief for the feast of Myrddod, I have lost too many of my true kinsmen... Out of three hundred wearing gold torques who hastened to Catraeth, alas, none escaped but for one man.

We hear that Cibro, before "the uproar of battle" took communion, but the three hundred seem bound together by the secular sacrament of the mead cup. Over this they utter not prayers but boasts, pledging themselves to deeds of valour, which they are thereby obliged to perform: or to perish in the attempt.

On the night before they set off for Catraeth, we can imagine one of the company in the hall of Myrddod, who drinks from the cup but does not join in the boasting. Instead, he sings. Perhaps, as David Jones says in the Preface to *In Parenthesis*, "He is instructed to sing... the song of the Battle of Camlann" - the song, now lost, that lies behind Malory's *Morte Darthur*. "This tale Sir Bedivere, a Knight of the Table Round, made it to be written" - Sir Bedivere, who left the battlefield echoing Job's messenger: "I only am escaped to tell thee."

Perhaps Aneurin sang on the field of Catraeth - as Talieffair was to sing the *Chanson de Roland*, riding in front of the Normans at Hastings, tossing his sword in the air. At all events, we know how Aneurin left the battlefield:

Aeron's two war-hounds and tough  
And myself, soaked in blood, for my song's sake.

His escape indicates no act of cowardice. That blood testifies to an active role in the battle, but a poet of the hero-age was not primarily a warrior. His function was to ensure that his friends did not die unnamed. He must escape that he may tell, bear witness that what was promised in the hall was performed on the field. "Bleeding son of Eli was a wild boar for ferocious" the son of Nwythion slew a hundred

princes wearing gold torques so that he might be celebrated: "the son of Synno (the swotsayer foreknew it) sold his life that his glory might be told forth... because of his pledge... he charged forwards in the forefront of the men of Gwynedd."

Aneurin, of course, was neither the first nor the last Welsh poet to bear such witness. Taliesin told his listeners:

There was many a corpse beside Argoed Llwyfain;  
From warriors ravens grew red,  
And with their leaders a host attacked.  
For a whole year I shall sing their triumph.

And when I'm grown old, with death hard upon me,  
I'll not be happy save to praise Urien.

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped to tell thee.

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Whether Aneurin intended it or not, the double coincidence of the three hundred - elsewhere in *The Gododdin* defined as three bands - and the one survivor, adds a tragic resonance to his poem. Not of course that this is a narrative, although a narrative emerges from the sequence of elegies with which the poet celebrates the exploits of those who fell at Catraeth. For Aneurin, as a man of rank, extols the officers and gentlemen but makes no mention of the "other ranks", the infantry, whom scholars assume to have accompanied each mounted knight. He extols them not as an obsequist or war-correspondent, but as kinsman and friend:

In a shining array they fed together round the wine-vessel. My heart has become full of grief for the feast of Myrddod, I have lost too many of my true kinsmen... Out of three hundred wearing gold torques who hastened to Catraeth, alas, none escaped but for one man.

We hear that Cibro, before "the uproar of battle" took communion, but the three hundred seem bound together by the secular sacrament of the mead cup. Over this they utter not prayers but boasts, pledging themselves to deeds of valour, which they are thereby obliged to perform: or to perish in the attempt.

Perhaps Aneurin sang on the field of Catraeth - as Talieffair was to sing the *Chanson de Roland*, riding in front of the Normans at Hastings, tossing his sword in the air. At all events, we know how Aneurin left the battlefield:

Aeron's two war-hounds and tough  
And myself, soaked in blood, for my song's sake.

His escape indicates no act of cowardice. That blood testifies to an active role in the battle, but a poet of the hero-age was not primarily a warrior. His function was to ensure that his friends did not die unnamed. He must escape that he may tell, bear witness that what was promised in the hall was performed on the field. "Bleeding son of Eli was a wild boar for ferocious" the son of Nwythion slew a hundred

alone and in distress.  
Swam o'er the sea's expanse back to his people.

but the poet does not interrupt his narrative to name or praise those whom the survivor survives.

The notable exception, of course, is "The Battle of Maldon", of all Old English poems the closest in tone to *The Gododdin*. Its unknown poet knows and names his warriors, distinguishing their weapons, reporting their speeches, persuading us that he too had his place in their shield-wall. But if he did, and if Bryhtnoth's hearth-companions were true to their boasts that they would not leave their leader's body, how did the poem come to be written? I see him at the last, taking leave of his companions and escaping.

It seemed that out of battle I escaped  
Down some profound dull tunnel, long  
Since scooped  
Through granites which titanic wars  
Had groined.

"I only escaped to tell thee." But what he tells us is not what Aneurin tells us, testifying to the heroic exploits of his friends. Though Owen also speaks of a

the accompanying manuscript draft of Moncreiff's first 179 lines confirms that Owen was familiar with *The Song of Roland*, and we are left with the problem of whether the dedication was altered simply because he was dead, or whether - as I prefer to think - he had expressed himself unhappy to be associated with the chivalric tradition. Before he died, however, he had testified in the tradition of his Welsh forbears:

It seemed that out of battle I escaped  
Down some profound dull tunnel, long  
Since scooped  
Through granites which titanic wars  
Had groined.

"I only escaped to tell thee." But what he tells us is not what Aneurin tells us, testifying to the heroic exploits of his friends. Though Owen also speaks of a

Roland could find, and, for a reasonable while, enjoy, his Oliver." Echoes of the *Chanson de Roland* reverberate throughout *In Parenthesis*. John Ball has a friend, the signaller Oliver, of whom we are reminded when the poet numbers among the dead

Tallieffair the maker,  
and on the same day,  
thirty thousand other ranks.  
And in the country of Bearn - Oliver  
and all the rest - so many without  
memento  
beneath the turmoil on the high hills  
and under the harvest places.

At the end of *In Parenthesis*, Jones gives Turlo, the maker of the *Chanson de Roland*, the honour of the last word:

The geste says this and the man  
who was on the field... and who  
wrote the book... and the man  
who does not know this has not  
understood anything.

*In Parenthesis* is a difficult work. Jones called it a "writing", at once acknowledging and dodging his reader's first question: "Is it poetry or prose?" Having read it, we know the answer is "both". It has the narrative structure we associate with the novel, but its language at many points takes on the allusiveness, density, and momentum of poetry. This blending of categories, like its blending of matter ancient and modern, unsettles the reader - as, clearly, Jones meant him to be unsettled - and leaves him with the problem of how "this writing" is to be read. Some of its most attentive readers have come to different conclusions. Herbert Read found it "as near a great epic of the war as ever the war generation will reach"; a judgment John H. Johnston endorsed, though neither, I think, has satisfactorily explained how the reader's epic expectations are manipulated, confirmed and denied by Jones's modernist variations of his form. Paul Fussell, who holds that the Great War "will not be understood in traditional terms", finds *In Parenthesis* "curiously ambiguous and indecisive... a deeply conservative work which uses the past not, as it often pretends to do, to shame the present, but blindly to enable it". In Fussell's view, the book is an "honourable misreading" by a "very dull student". I disagree with him, but his criticisms raise crucial questions, which bear on how "this writing" is to be read, and that problem I should now like to consider.

Setting aside for the moment Jones's Preface, in which he speaks frankly and informally, as author to reader, we are introduced in the Dedication to the more hieratic intonation of the poet. Its opening words proclaim it part of the work - THIS WRITING IS FOR MY FRIENDS. Printed in capital letters and without punctuation, it looks like a war memorial and sounds like a poem.

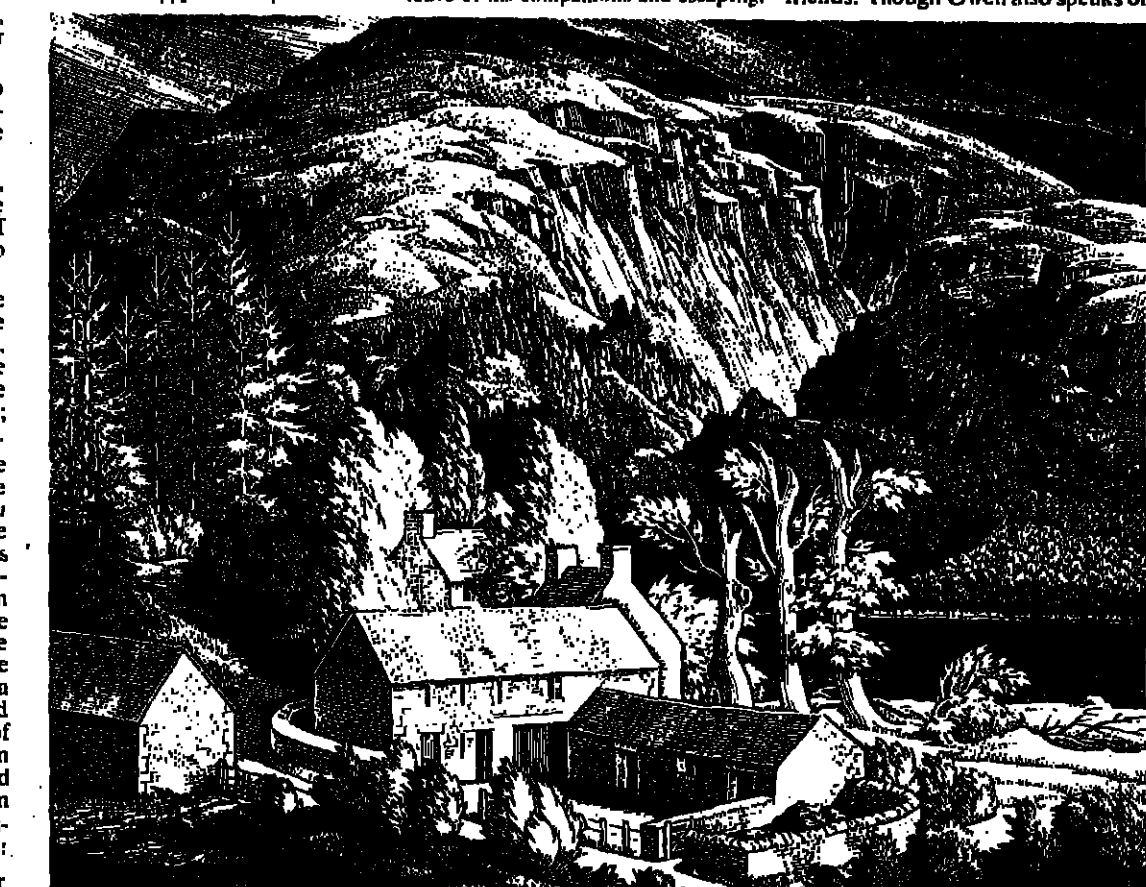
The Dedication states the theme, which is the commemoration of the dead - friends and enemies who shared the same pains. Dedication is followed by Prologue, by the title of Part I and its epigraph - three quotations, three chords - if you like, extending and developing the echoes of the Dedication. In the Prologue, quoting from Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of *The Mabhinogion* - because that by Thomas Jones and Gwyn Jones was not then available - Jones speaks through the lips of the teller of the tale of Branwen the Daughter of Llŷr:

Evil betide me if I do not open the door to know if that is true which is said concerning it. So be opened the door... and when they had looked, they were conscious of all the evils they had ever sustained, and of all the friends and companions they had lost... and because of their perturbation they could not rest.

The same recognition of friends and companions lost, the same perturbation preventing rest, are transmitted by the title of Part I: "THE MANY MEN SO BEAUTIFUL". On the white page below or in the absence that follows, we find the rest of Coleridge's stanza taking shape:

And they all dead did lie,  
And a thousand thousand slay things  
Lived on; and so did I.

So with the epigraph to Part I, in which another lone survivor, sufferer of a



"Welsh Farm 1961" a woodcut by George Mackay, one of many engravings of the countryside which he made between 1927 and 1969. Mackay's fine technique and predilection for landscape are strikingly demonstrated in George Mackay Wood-Engraver (136pp. Gresham Books. The Gresham Press, Old Woking, Surrey. £17.50. 0 905 418 903) from which this illustration and the one on page 96 are taken. The book, which contains "all the known artistic work" of the engraver and includes several of his preparatory sketches, will be published in November this year when the Ashmolean Museum are mounting an exhibition of their collection of Mackay's engravings. The Gresham Press have also reissued George Mackay's own book on the art of wood-engraving which was first published in 1949.

like Aneurin, soaked in blood, for his song's sake.

Almost one thousand years later, in 1919, there was published a new translation of the *Chanson de Roland*. Made by Charles Scott Moncreiff, it was dedicated:

To three men  
scholars, poets, soldiers  
who came to their Ronsvals  
in September, October, and November  
nineteen hundred and eighteen  
I dedicate my part in a book  
of which their friendship  
quickened the beginning  
their example has  
justified the continuing  
Philip Blairbridge  
Wilfred Owen  
Ian Mackenzie

The translator has been a close friend of Wilfred Owen, among whose papers an earlier form of dedication is to be found:

To Mr W.O.  
To you, my master in assonance,  
I dedicate my part in this assonant  
poem: that you may cover  
the faults in my handwriting with  
the protection of your name. At  
this time lessons are to be found in  
the Song of Roland that all of us  
may profitably learn: to pursue  
chivalry, to avoid, to punish  
treachery and to fight uncomplainingly  
with support is withheld from  
us to live, in fine, honourably and  
die gallantly. So I have worked  
and written that the song of our  
forbears heard but Norman forbears  
be about at Hastings may not  
be altogether unheard in their children's  
armies.

Unlike Owen, however, he was able to reflect on the experience of the trenches for almost twenty years before putting pen to paper, and by then had come to see that experience in a wider, historical context. His Preface speaks in terms of which Scott Moncreiff would have approved: of "the intimate, continuing, domestic life of small contingents of men, within whose structure

friend, it is of a "strange friend" who tells him:

"I am the enemy you killed, my friend:  
I knew you in the dark: for so you  
frowned  
Yesterday through me as you jabbed  
and killed:  
I parried; by my hand you were loath and  
cold."

Much of the force of this derives from the Christian subversion of the pagan heroic terms; a subversion proclaimed by another Welsh poet of the Great War, David Jones, in his dedication to *In Parenthesis*:

THIS WRITING IS FOR MY FRIENDS  
IN MIND OF ALL COMMON & HIDDEN  
MEN AND OF THE SECRET PRINCES  
AND TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE  
WITH ME IN THE COVERT AND IN  
THE OPEN

AND TO THE ENEMY  
FRONT-FIGHTERS WHO ARE OUR  
PAINS AGAINST WHOM WE  
FOUND OURSELVES BY MISADVENTURE  
Jones, like Owen, accords the enemy the status of honorary friends.

Unlike Owen, however, he was able to reflect on the experience of the trenches for almost twenty years before putting pen to paper, and by then had come to see that experience in a wider, historical context. His Preface speaks in terms of which Scott Moncreiff would have approved: of "the intimate, continuing, domestic life of small contingents of men, within whose structure



similar loss and a similar perturbation, speak:

Men marched, they kept equal step . . .  
Men marched, they had been nurtured together

Even a Welsh reader might not recognize the source of these lines, as *The Gododdin*, but neither will an Irish reader recognize the sources of every quotation in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Modernist writers, however, have taught their readers how to respond to this strategy and, if the author of *In Parenthesis* is a "turgid allusionist", as Fussell charges, the authors of *Ulysses*, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", and *The Waste Land* must stand indicted of the same offence – and to a greater degree, in that their allusions are culled from wider fields of reference.

Jones, unlike Joyce, assists his reader with notes, so there can be no mistaking the one message of his three preliminary quotations. They introduce the action like the voice of the chorus in Greek tragedy, and the descendants of those who died at Catraeth once again keep "equal step".

49 Wynn, 01549 Wynn.  
Coming Sergeant.  
Pick 'em up, pick 'em up – I'll stalk within  
Private Leg . . . sick.  
Private Bull . . . silent.

The shift of tone – from tragic poetry to comic prose – is bold and brilliantly successful. One must not overlook the jokes: that at the expense of the most famous poem by Sir Thomas Wynn, whose book *Cerynne Poems* was published in 1549 – "01549 Wynn" – and, more important, Jones's pun on his hero's name. Fussell misses two thirds of the point when he says that John Ball is "named after the priest, who led the Peasants' Revolt in 1381". Our Private Ball, who follows Private Leg in the sergeant's roster, is sacerdotal, surely, but also ballistic – and it must be said – anatomical. When finally he comes on parade, "that silence peculiar to parade grounds and to recitations" is broken – but broken liturgically.

Captain Gwyn does not turn or move or give any sign.  
Have that man's name taken if you please, Mr. Jenkins.  
Take that man's name, Sergeant Snell.  
Take his name, corporal.  
Take his name take his number – charge him – late on parade – the Battalion being paraded for overseas – warn him for Company Officer.  
Have you got his name Corporal Quilter.

Temporary unpaid Lance-Corporal Aneurin Merddyn Lewis had somewhere in his Welsh depths a remembrance of the nature of man, of how a lance-corporal's stripe is but held vicariously and from on high, is of one texture with an eternal economy. He brings in a manner, baptism, and metaphysical order to the bankruptcy of the occasion.

"01 Ball is it – there was a man in Bethesda late for the last bloody judgement.  
Corporal Quilter on the other hand knew nothing of these things.

The narrator, like his Lance-Corporal, brings a metaphysical order to the bankruptcy of the occasion. A prosaic manner is appropriate to an age all-but-bankrupt in terms of heroic and religious values, but we are reminded that some hierarchies are still observed. Lance-Corporal Aneurin – named, no doubt, after the poet – holds his stripe vicariously (like a vicar) and from on high, and his joke has a prophetic ring: "01 Ball is it – there was a man in Bethesda late for the last bloody judgement." Ball, the survivor, will be late for the last bloody judgement attended by the rest of his platoon. The Welshman has in its depths a remembrance, but the English corporal Quilter on the other hand knew nothing of these things.

The Lance-Corporal's bardic namesake had celebrated the high-ranking heroes of *The Gododdin* in a high style. The low-ranking celebrant of a more democratic heroism, though his ear is marvellously attuned to social distinctions. As befits a poet whose first memory "was of a thing of great marvel – a troop of horses moving in a column to the *laving* of *bugles*", and who thereupon resolved "some day I shall

ride on horseback", his mounted officers are generally presented in chivalric terms. Mr Jenkins, in keeping with his lower station, is presented in gentlemanly terms – "The Squire from the Rout of San Romano smokes Melchior No. 9" – and presented affectionately:

Mr. Jenkins got his full lieutenantcy on his twenty-first birthday, and a parcel from Fortnum and Mason; he grieved for his friend, Talbot Rhys [killed and left hanging on the wire], and felt an indifference to the spring offensive – and why was non-conforming Captain Gwyn so stuffy about the trebled whisky clits.

With the exception of "that shit Major Lillywhite" and one other officer, all the characters in *In Parenthesis* are presented sympathetically, including "the enemy front-fighters" and those who pray for them behind the lines:

But all the old women in Bavaria are busy with their novenas, you bet your life, and don't sleep lest the watch should fail, nor weave for the wire might trip his darling feet and the dead Karl might not come home.

Jones has his indignation, but it is reserved for a certain category of non-combatants first referred to in Part 2, entitled "CHAMBERS GO OFF, CORPORALS STAY". This opens with the troops being lectured "in the barn, with its great roof, sprung, upreaching, humane, and redolent of a vanished order". There are lectures on hygiene by the medical officer, "who glossed his technical discourses with every lewdness, whose heroism and humanity reached toward sanctity". Like the great roof of the barn, upreaching, humane, he speaks of a vanished order; as, in a sense, does the Adjutant when he addresses them on the history of the Regiment. But "The old order changeth, yielding place to new", and Jones portrays the representative of the new less kindly:

The Bombing Officer . . . told them lightly of the efficacy of his trade; he predicted an important future for the new Mills Mk. IV grenades, just on the market; he discussed the improvised jam-tins of the veterans, of the bombs after the Marne, grenades of Loos and Leventic – he compared these elementary, amateurish, inefficient devices with the compact and supremely satisfactory invention of this Mr. Mills, to whom his country was so greatly indebted.

Long before the Bombing Officer takes his leave "like a departing commercial traveller", Jones's scornful irony has told us that he is no gentleman and has no understanding of history, heroism, or humanity. This theme is developed further at the end of Part 2, when the "Chambers Go Off" and our hero is introduced to the supremely satisfactory invention of someone in Mr Mills's line of trade:

John Ball would have followed, but stood fixed and alone in the little yard – his senses highly alert, his body incapable of movement or response. The exact disposition of small things – the precise shapes of trees, the movement of a straw, the disappearing right boot of Sergeant Snell – all minute noises, separate and distinct, in a stillness charged through with some approaching violence – registered not by the ear nor any single faculty, but an on-rushing pervasion, saturating all existence, with excitement, logarithmic, dial-timed, millennial – of calculated velocity, some mean chemist's contrivance, a stinking physicist's destroying toy.

The indictment of the scientist, delivered with all the explosive force of that rhetorical suspension is delivered more coolly and more searchingly in the Preface:

We feel a rubicon has been passed about striking with a hand weapon as men used to do and loosing poison from the sky as we do ourselves. We doubt the decency of our inventions . . .

Not everyone would feel the same about the decency of striking with a hand weapon. Jones's use of the word is revealing. *Decency* is the distinguishing characteristic of the gentleman, that nineteenth-century mutation of the medieval knight. The traditions of the gentleman were

chivalric, humanistic, and tended to produce a deep distrust of science. The subject of *In Parenthesis* is the destruction of an old order – still recognizably chivalric – by a new disorder, here represented by "some mean chemist's contrivance, a stinking physicist's destroying toy".

The immensity of that destruction reinforces the tragic dignity with which Mr Jenkins's platoon prepares for what the reader knows will be its last battle. Two moments of preparation, in particular, evoke the rituals of the old order, and at both the narrator adopts the shorter line, the higher style, of poetry. As Cibno took communion and his comrades drank together before setting off for Catraeth, so the men of the section receive the sacrament – "one-third part of a loaf" and a share of the "half mess-tin of rum":

Come off it Moses – dole out the issue. Dispense salvation, strictly apportion it, let us taste and see, let us be renewed, for Christ's sake let us be warm . . . Each one in turn, and humbly receives his meagre benefit. This lance-jack from his iron spoon; and this is thankworthy

The sacrament of Last Supper is followed – as the meat-drinking in the hall of Mynddog was followed – by the toast. Dai Great-coat

articulates his English with an alien care. My fathers were with the Black Prince of Wales at the passion of the blind Bohemian King. They served in these fields, . . .

Dai's boast, modelled on Talfiein's in *The Mablogion*, asserts that he was present at all the major moments in the history of the "hand weapon", from the primal war in Heaven to the Crucifixion, from Roncesvalles to Camlann. That history begins its last chapter with Part 7 of *In Parenthesis*, entitled "THE FIVE UNMISTAKEABLE MARKS". The allusion to the five wounds of the crucified Christ is balanced by the secular epigraph:

Gododdin I demand thy support. It is our duty to aid: a meeting place has been found.

Involving Aneurin's aid, in Aneurin's words, Jones proceeds to discharge his duty as a poet: he sings – there is more poetry in Part 7 than in any other – of the meeting at Mametz Wood in July 1916. As the platoon waits to go over the top on "the place of a skull", the first of the comrades is killed:

No one to care there for Aneurin Lewis who worshipped his ancestors like a saint. Who sleeps in Arthur's lap . . .

His elegiac appositions blame, but not to the enemy:

Properly organized chemists can let more riveting power than ever more blistered is he that painted Troy and unwholesome limb from limb, than any fallen at Catraeth . . .

At zero hour, Mr Jenkins takes them over – and almost at once:

Lurched over, jerked iron saucer over, clamped unkindly over lip and chin nor so venal to this darkening and masked face life to grope the air . . .

Veritable – the Old French word for a helmet's movable visor – reminds us that it is the Squire from the Rout of San Romano who has fallen. But the Disciplines of the Wars are maintained "and Sergeant T. Quilter takes over". One by one, however, the "family" – Jones's word – is cut down until Private Ball finds himself, first, "alone in a denseness of haze-brush", and then shot in the leg. He crawls away, encumbered by his rifle:

Slung so, it swings its full weight. With you going blindly on all paws, it slews its whole length, to hang at your bowed neck like the Mariner's white owl . . . Hung so about, you make . . . your close escape.

She plait torques of equal splendour for Mr. Jenkins and Billy Crower.  
Hansel with Gronwy share dog-violets for a palm, where they lie in serious embrace beneath the twisted tripod.

The modern poet makes no distinction between officer and private soldier: they receive "torques of equal splendour" – we remember the dog torques of *The Gododdin* – and German and Welshman, friend and so-called enemy, embrace. At the last, the survivor disengages himself from his rifle, as the Ancient Mariner (with whom he had earlier identified himself) had disengaged himself from his albatross. I think we are meant to infer that he, too, has expiated his guilt as a killer and, having escaped, must tell. His message, however, is not that of Aneurin and Turold; the celebration of the heroic deed, that their names may live and their example be followed. David Jones bears witness to the death of friends who never saw the men that killed them. When Fussell calls *In Parenthesis* a work "which uses the past not, as it often pretends to do, to shame the present, but really to ennoble it", he fails to recognize that Jones's present is a battlefield on which past and future clash in unequal combat. The poet celebrates the traditional humanity of his heroes show to one another, their courage in the face of almost certain death, as he exorcises the inhumanity of the mechanistic forces brought against them.

Twenty-seven years after Private Jones of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers escaped from that stricken field, Lieutenant Alan Lewis of the South Wales Borderers lay on an operating table in an Indian hospital. Afterwards he wrote: "I surrendered to what Edward Thomas foresaw – the land he must enter and leave alone". He also wrote a poem, "Burma Casualty". In this, a wounded survivor escapes death a second time – on the operating table:

The words of a dead man  
Are modied in the guts of the living.

All our words were once the property of the dead. In the Preface to *In Parenthesis*, Jones says: "I did not intend this as a 'War Book' – it happens to be concerned with war." The message of the so-called "war poet" is essentially the same as that of his fellow poet in times of so-called "peace". He pays his dues to the living in the currency of the dead.

Emboldened by the French maxim that "all generalizations are untrue, including this one", let me suggest that the work of Celtic poets in general, and that of Welsh poets in particular, is generated by, animated by, a stronger sense of kinship with the dead than you find in English or American poetry. For reasons of temperament and history, the Welsh have always had a more tribal sense of community than the English or the Americans, and in that community the dead have their place. Over and over again we see a Welsh poet's appetite for life sharpened by an awareness of how it tasted on the tongue, sounded on the tongue, of the dead. Knowing himself a survivor – one who lives above (super-vives) as well as beyond the dead – he proclaims, what-over else his message: "I only am escaped to tell thee".

He went alone: knew nothing; returned Reiching and blind with pain, and yet Alive.  
IV  
Mending, with books and papers and a fan  
Sunlight on parquet floors and bowls of flame  
He heard quite casually that his friends were dead.  
His regiment too butchered to reform.  
And he lay in the lighness of the ward  
Thinking of all the lids the dark enfolds  
So secretly.  
And yet a man may walk  
Into and through it, and return alive.

The tone is Owen's: the disarming

## Beyond discontent

By Jean Wilson

BARRY GRADMAN:  
Metamorphosis in Keats  
140pp. Brighton: Harvester. £15.95.  
0 7108 0052 5

Keats is a poet about whom it is appealingly difficult to write without sentimentality. The circumstances of his life, the emotional intensity of his poetic achievement, the stoicism with which he met his death in Rome, make it impossible to contemplate him without being moved, and it is an adept critic who can convey his emotion without falling into emotionalism. On the whole Barry Gradman has avoided this trap, apart from the "Protestant" cemetery at Rome. But this is the most positive thing to be said for this short and outrageously priced book.

Dr Gradman has padded out material that would have made an interesting journal article. His thesis is that moments of metamorphosis in Keats's work follow a consistent pattern, and that by examining them we may trace both his development as a poet and the development of his ideas about poetry. He defines metamorphosis as a three-stage pattern – a state of discontent . . . followed by some sort of lapse of ordinary

adverb "casually" setting up the reader for the shock of what follows: first, the general news "that his friends are dead"; then the more specific information that, in Owen's phrase, they had died "as cattle" – "His regiment too butchered to reform".

In another of Lewis's poems, "The Run-In", a soldier on a landing craft is

contemplating this question against the enemy, and thinking  
Always when I awake there is a little wind on my skin and I sweat and cannot find any consolation and cannot tell  
What point in the universe I am. There is no recreation, no friendship with the living, and the living often hold their profoundest loyalties with the dead. And most of us owe something both to the dead and the living, and move almost unconsciously between the worlds.

Aneurin, Owen, Jones, and Lewis come to us – as the four messengers came to Job – saying in turn: "Only am escaped to tell thee". They come to tell the living of the dead, and hearing them bear witness to how they lived and how they died, we become aware of the paradox that it is the song and not the singer that escapes. As Auden reminds us:

The words of a dead man  
Are modied in the guts of the living.

All our words were once the property of the dead. In the Preface to *In Parenthesis*, Jones says: "I did not intend this as a 'War Book' – it happens to be concerned with war." The message of the so-called "war poet" is essentially the same as that of his fellow poet in times of so-called "peace". He pays his dues to the living in the currency of the dead.

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The study of Swift's writings in general has often been bedevilled by an excessive emphasis on themes and on structure. On the ideological coherence of his beliefs and the supposed orderly arrangement of his compositions. In a writer so elusive, ironic and so given to unsettling and aggressive mimics of disorder, such treatments have been especially reductive, and some recent discussions of the poems have imported from studies of the prose works the same limiting habits. The more enlightening commentators, however, have sensed that beyond ideology or form, important as these are, lies an almost always more important question: that of his characteristic *tone*, in a sense which implies a whole style of feeling and thought. A. B. England's is one of the few studies of the poems consistently animated by this assumption.

He begins with a chapter on the early Pindaric odes, which are not usually rated very highly, and which interest England for some aspects of their manner rather than for their quality. The Pindaric style, as Cowley promoted it, sanctioned certain forms of "energy", a metaphorical boldness, a metrical emancipation from the tighter regularities of the couplet. Swift's writings are notable for their "energy" in several powerful ways. In these Cowleyan grandeur are not usually among them. Swift's temperamental reserve, in most "lofty styles" finds its exception in these early poems, but their failure confirms that the style was ill-suited to him and his quick abandonment of this manner confirms that he knew it.

England's contribution is to bring out a quality of self-display in these

A. B. ENGLAND:

Energy and Order in the Poetry of Swift  
241pp. Associated University Presses.  
\$18.50.  
0 8387 2367 5

Swift's poems, after long neglect, have become a growth industry. For a long time, the only adequate introduction to them in book form was Maurice Johnson's *The Sin of Wit* (1950). Now there are at least six books, published in the past few years or known to be about to appear. The most recent are A. B. England's volume, and an attractive collection of essays edited by John Irwin Fischer and Donald C. Melt to which England has also contributed, and which is published by the same group.

Writing poems was no small part of Swift's activity. In sheer bulk, his poetic output was not far short of Pope's, if one excludes Pope's Homer. The poems have suffered neglect because Swift's great prose satires naturally command the lion's share of attention, and because they have not been easy to accommodate with the Pope-centred conception of Augustan poetry which has served as the working model for the academic reevaluation of eighteenth-century literature in the past fifty years. The Pope-centred view is itself much older, of course, and goes back to Pope himself. Swift was infected with it. His self-deprecating claim to have been "only a Man of Rhimes", and the tendency of his own contemporaries to grant full poetic status only to the more elevated styles, have also helped to keep the standing of his poems low among critics. But practising poets from Byron to Eliot, Auden and James Reeves have known the value of his flat "low" styles. His place in that "colloquial tradition" which runs from Skelton and Cotton and Butler is a strong one and his example contributed creatively to the reinstatement of "light verse" as a self-respecting poetic idiom in this century. He himself made no great claims. But his modest disclaimer of "serious Couplets" was accompanied by an insistence that his "Rhimes" had their own special seriousness, "never without a moral View".

The study of Swift's writings in general has often been bedevilled by an excessive emphasis on themes and on structure. On the ideological coherence of his beliefs and the supposed orderly arrangement of his compositions. In a writer so elusive, ironic and so given to unsettling and aggressive mimics of disorder, such treatments have been especially reductive, and some recent discussions of the poems have imported from studies of the prose works the same limiting habits. The more enlightening commentators, however, have sensed that beyond ideology or form, important as these are, lies an almost always more important question: that of his characteristic *tone*, in a sense which implies a whole style of feeling and thought. A. B. England's is one of the few studies of the poems consistently animated by this assumption.

At times, indeed, Swift's most cherished didactic purposes are themselves subverted by an unmoralized agglomeration of untidy facts. England sees this occurring especially in the "Description of a City Shower". He suggests that the distinctive form of this mock-epic is not (as had been claimed) a reversal of some primary moral formula based on the contrast of low matter with high style, but rather an outright absence of didacticism. There is a good deal to be said for this view. It is certainly preferable to the neatly schematized interpretations of this poem and its companion, the "Description of the Morning", which are in current circulation. I think England perhaps underestimates the extent to which Swift's delight in "energy", in the spectacular mimicry of unlimited folly and vice, is in itself a punitive exuberance, lightly heartily triumphant with imputations of guilt.

After a chapter on some poems which observe a more straightforward formal or didactic order, many full ways, but these Cowleyan grandeur are not usually among them. Swift's temperamental reserve, in most "lofty styles" finds its exception in these early poems, but their failure confirms that the style was ill-suited to him and his quick abandonment of this manner confirms that he knew it.

England's contribution is to bring out a quality of self-display in these

# The Rhimer's recoil

By Claude Rawson

poems, a "daring elum" which is actually close to the satirical manner in which Swift came to excel, would not actually being itself satirical. In the "Ode to the Athenian Society", for example, Swift offers an "apology" (self-vindication masquerading as contrition) for those "wild excursions of a youthful pen" which took him beyond "the narrow Path of Sense": but it "bears an obvious relationship", England points out, to the *Tale of a Tub*'s parodic announcement that the author "thought fit to make *Method and Reason*, and the Office of its *Laqueys*". It is an interesting but unexpected illustration of the principle that Swift's mockeries often curiously resemble attitudes he took seriously. The "Ode" cultivated "impression of accidental, fortuitous growth" after all brings "ostentatiously" into play that delight in the headlong accumulation of metaphor which the *Tale* indulges through parody. (In the later parts of the century, England similarly and more fully compares these "serious" poems with Swift's other great satire on Grub Street, *On Poetry: A Rhapsody*.)

The process England describes is helped by the fact that the "Ode" contains satiric denunciations of things Swift normally dislikes. But a tension is created because the poem actually has some of the "quality" of unpredictable, unarranged flux which he earlier rejected as a description of the Athenian Society. And then the poem also contains lines which can be suspected of some element of mockery of the Athenian Society itself, though its main drift is eulogistic: he did not then know that the Society consisted of Tubbean hacks. And this thrusting mixture of tones is above all notable for a display of "rhetorical invention": "Swift's primary impulse was towards a kind of rhetorical bravura". In poems of this early group he tends in various ways to "overspill the limits of a traditional literary form".

Chapter Two studies satirical poems whose *very satire* is subverted or exceeded by a "sheer metaphorical inventiveness" which works more for its own exuberant sake than as a contribution to the aggressive logic. The poems of this group also link up with the prose satires (*Tale, Modest Proposal*), as parodies of "formal logic", whose imagery develops a fierce alternative logic of its own at the expense of both the parodied argument and the parody itself, even as these are direct agents of Swift's aggression.

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no difficulty in agreeing with England that these, like most of the others, subvert their own form in some sense. But they partly do so in a way which Swift would not altogether have desired, which does him no credit, and which even good critics like England too often overlook. *Cadenus* and *Vanessa* seem out of line with itself not mainly because it contains a fiction of orderly debate for what is a disorderly and unresolved emotional imbroglio, but because it is a fussy, simpering and cruel exercise in self-justification and self-applause, masquerading as shame-faced apology.

The *Verses on the Death* show the tendency to disguised self-exaltation in a slightly less offensive form. The poem begins with La Rochefoucauld's famous maxim that we take pleasure in our friends' distresses. Swift goes on to say that he is no exception to this universal envy: he resents Pope for being a better poet, Jay for outdoing him in "my own humorous biting way", Arbuthnot for daring "to irony parody", and doing well at it, though it's Swift's territory. England is right that these comments are aligned with the maxim about envy, and also that there is "an element of irony in the references to his friends". What he doesn't tell us is that these neatly turned or elegantly tortuous compliments are in fact ostentatious displays of friendly generosity, which take the form of a pretended envy while actually showing how good Swift is at being envious.

England notes that in the next

## Childhood reconsidered

By David Bindman

ZACHARY LEADER:  
Reading Blake's Songs  
259pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.  
0 7100 0635 7

The *Songs of Innocence and Experience* have been the most accessible of Blake's works since their first appearance, and their childlike clarity has traditionally been contrasted with the impenetrability of the *Prophetic Books*. But it is possible to argue that the opposite is the case; for the *Prophetic Books* become clearer as one works on them, while the *Songs* seem to get more complicated. For one thing it is not easy to decide whether the *Songs* form a tightly organized sequence, each poem relating thematically to the other, or whether they are nearer to being a collection of miscellaneous poems gathered together from Blake's notebooks. The authorial voice can be ambiguous and it is often difficult to know when we should assume that the poet himself, the voice of a child, or even conventional authority is speaking through the poem. Such problems have often been raised by previous scholars, so we are entitled to ask of a new book on the subject what new perspectives it brings. Zachary Leader can reply with conviction that he has brought the *Songs* within the context of contemporary discussion of childhood and education, and also that he has, for the first time, given full weight to the designs which illuminate every page of the copies issued by Blake. We can then see how Blake rejects the conceptions of childhood held by the followers of Calvin, Locke and Rousseau, and how the Illuminations affect one's perceptions of: the poem.

The core of the book is a reading of the *Songs* which is constructed around certain unifying themes. The chapter entitled "Entering Innocence" examines the first seven pages of the *Songs of Innocence*, revealing how the idea of innocence is gradually unfolded to the reader. If one is being exact, one cannot really talk of "the first seven pages" because the order of the plates after

section of the poem the ostensible purpose of expounding and illustrating the maxim gives way to competing forces: chiefly the impulse to animated mimicry of the banalities of conversation as Swift imagines his survivors gossiping about his death. But an underlying threat in Swift's argument, its very scenario of a shadow society's inability to honour the author, is not properly brought out, and I think England similarly overlooks or plays down the real motive force of the famous final section, in which an "impartial" commentator delivers a ringing apology for the satirist.

As he knows, it's a complicated and extended passage, with some notorious bits of self-mockery, and some curious little in-jokes like the claim that "what he writ was all his own" when in fact those very words are stolen from another poet. But it also contains some very grand celebrations of Swift's record as a figure of heroic distinction ("Fair LIBERTY was all his Cry/For her he stood prepa'd to die") which, though largely deserved, have always embarrassed some readers. Here the problem is not mainly in the fact of self-praise, though that too has bothered some people. Such proud declarations of courage and integrity are not normally experienced as improper in certain poetic contexts, including several poems by Pope himself. The awkwardness of Swift's poem is not that he makes the rhetorical claims, but that he hides behind an "impartial" speaker invented precisely to get him off this hook but

succeeding only in impaling him more firmly upon it. England writes well of Swift's ironic play with the satirist's *apologia*. But the fact is that the more open self-celebration sanctioned by the recognized conventions of the *apologia* could have removed the problem: Pope got away with it all the time in his later poetry. England has good things to say about Pope's "ideal person" and its differences from Swift's. But the essential difference is that Pope's *personae* don't usually pretend to be something other than authorial projections, openly adopted in the poet's own name.

England argues with more ingenuity than some recent commentators that Swift is satirizing his own "impartial" speaker, and turning him also into an illustration of the opening maxim about serving our own private ends. I think this is doing Swift too much honour, in much the same way as his taking at face value Swift's earlier self-exaltations over the merits of Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot. Again the awkward suggestion of self-mockery serves mainly to slip in some potent and not undeserved credit for Swift while pretending to do the opposite. He is not disowning his speaker but indulging himself through him in a rather clumsy and transparent concealment. The only reservation I have about England's generally neutre and generous reading is his refusal, along with many of Swift's other admirers, to face up to an occasional weakness of character which hardly lessens Swift's achievement.

pleasurable consciousness of serious and eschatological themes.

Another group of *Songs* is grouped by the author around the theme of the danger to adults of the lapse into conventional perception. This emerges well in the sensitive discussion of "A Cradle Song" and the "Nurse's Song" where the elegiac mood is excellently captured. I am not so sure however about the interpretation of "The Little Black Boy" whose mother is seen to present a conventional vision of Christ which the reader should identify as a false one. Even if this is so it is perverse to argue that the depiction of Christ in the tailpiece shows him to be an Antichrist, who gives himself away by his "crouched, bent and weary" form. He does nothing of the sort, and it surely cannot be right to parallel the protective attitude towards the little white boy with the self-absorbed attitude which defines this particular tree, which seems to me to be bursting with happy sounds. Nor am I convinced by a suggestion that the children are imbibing fatal knowledge that will lead them prematurely into Experience. It is a well-used convention of children's books of the period that the title page shows the book itself being read: by a devoted and protective mother or nurse.

A knowledge of such conventions would mitigate the author's tendency to read the designs with too close an attention to minutiae at the expense of a broader understanding of the disjunctions between text and design. Dr Leader's analysis of "The Echoing Green" as a poem is masterly, leading towards the conclusion that it is poised between a vision of process in which all elements contribute to joy, beauty and security, and one in which the process will itself soon end and the possibility of such vision. The elements in the design do not, however, simply illustrate that reading: the association of protective tree, village elders and playing children creates an image of rural content made familiar by many current engraved illustrations to Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*. By using such conventional images Blake was employing the familiar language of the genre of juvenile literature, no doubt with the intention of luring young readers into a

Harry C. Payne is the editor of Volume 10 of *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (822pp. University of Wisconsin Press. £17.50). "Locke's Essay and the Strategies of Eighteenth-Century English Satire" and "Blake and Newton: Argument as Art, Argument as Science" are among the twenty-six contributions on a variety of aspects of the period.



# High jinks at the Hall

By Paul Taylor

NICHOLAS SALAMAN:  
The Frights  
169pp. Allison Press/Secker and Warburg, £5.95.  
0 436 44085 7

On Cutcombe Hall, tucked in a vale of Somersetshire, the hot summer sun serenely shines. It is 1942 and England is at war. Up at the Hall, Grinny Sanderson, its bullying mistress, tries desperately to preserve the pre-war decencies and rituals of a country-house life. With its turns out, hilariously little success. For in this quiet backwater, a galaxy of oddballs are at war with one another and within themselves, engaged in little but lethal wars on which the War is having its due effect.

The setting of Nicholas Salaman's excellent first novel is very Wodehousian but whereas untainted innocence is the radiant medium in which all of Wodehouse's novels take their furious course (Satan having sportingly overlooked Blandings Castle and the Drones Club when dishing out Original Sin), in Nicholas Salaman's loving recreation of period pastoral, guilt, anxiety and terror keep bursting in. They don't (and this is one of the novel's triumphs) ever wipe away one's grin of pleasure at the lunatic proceedings, but they do perhaps replace that grin, by the end, with a slightly more thoughtful smile.

The "Frights" come, in one way or another, to each of the bizarre cast of characters awkwardly ensconced in or connected with the Hall. They are, in the first instance, the inevitable invention of Rufus, Grinny Sanderson's little grandson, for the purpose of scaring the pants off his younger brother, Adam. These terrifying creatures, he gleefully invents in his duty to destroy Adam if Rufus fails to supply him daily with the Sleeping Draught which wards them off. The administering or otherwise of this necessary beverage depends rather heavily on Adam's total compliance with Rufus's will. This usually involves Adam consenting to be cheerfully thrashed at all the one-sided games his older brother devises. Telling the adults about either the Frights or the Sleeping Draught is, Adam is reliably informed, the quickest way of guaranteeing possibly disastrous Fright reprisals. One of the funniest strands of this intricate plotted novel is that which deals with Adam's mounting terror in this no-win situation and with Rufus's quite Byzantine meanness, while one of the most truthful pieces of character analysis is that in which Adam suddenly realizes that the Frights exist nowhere but in his own imagination.

Things are scarcely less agitated in the adult world, which the children view with devastating scorn. Here a sexual imbroglio, of which the cast of an Iris Murdoch novel could be justifiably proud, is being hectically played out. Julia, the boys' preternaturally arousing mother, has sex with Major Caldwell, the commander of the American base at St. Paget's Bay, and then falls in love with Lieutenant Lippincott, the Base's Education Officer. Her husband's important intelligence work, has been having an affair with Griselda, who lives with her Italian husband (a possible Fascist spy) in one of the Hall's converted stables. Franco, being a mainstream artist, showers the maidens of the village with his sexual largesse. Meanwhile Nanny, who sets about getting herself impregnated by Rogers, the gardener (there's a hilarious scene in which the amazed boys watch this ceremony) and Adam is encouraged to show his private parts to little Lucy, his cousin, who gladly and enthusiastically returns the compliment. These lapses have one unfortunate thing in common. They have all been observed and absorbed by Chelly, Chops, Grinny's blood-curdling and natured companion. Stone-deaf and

a seething mass of grievances, Chelly keeps her unwieldy hearing-aid perpetually turned up to "max" (except when Grinny is feeding) to detect the slightest tremor of human weakness and there is little that escapes her remarkably proficient ears. All these juicy peccadillos are being stored up for the one really splendid shattering of Grinny's complacency that Chelly has been looking forward to for years. She is even aware of Grinny's own secret terror - that an invading German army will find out what few people know, that she is a quarter Jewish, and promptly convert the Mistress of Cutcombe into a bedside lampshade.

The novel expertly keeps all these bulls in the air. Further frights are added by Salaman's comic exploration of Lieutenant Lippincott's obsession with the possibility that time can get separated, like light, into multiple strands and that each moment contains a spectrum of comic possibilities, ranging from the ecstatic to the excruciating, which, if there is electromagnetic disturbance, can be electromagnetically actualized. Under the various pressures of trying

# Days of repentance

By Nicholas Spoliar

ROLF SCHNEIDER:  
November  
Translated from the German by Michael Bullock  
235pp. Hamish Hamilton, £7.95.  
0 241 10347 9

Rolf Schneider's *November* is an eloquent novel whose subject is partly political, the condition of East Germany, and partly - readably and convincingly - a particular East German woman, her son, her failures and her dilemmas. The lives of the two central characters, Natasha and Stefan Roth, are knit together with the author's developing theme of social and other injustice, injustice and conforming writer, in part represented in the need to protest against. The book's title is taken from some lines by the German novelist Joseph Roth, and these, which act as a brief prolegomenon to the novel, suggest aptly the mingled claustrophobia, guilt, apathy and atavism which define its atmosphere:

In November . . . every hour is as long as a day of repentance, as long as All Souls' Day. . . in which we do not merely encounter ghosts, but become ghosts ourselves. The day is not like a day, but like the offspring of night. Between dawn and dusk there lies a wad of compact, wet cottonwool: atmospheric cottonwool. What can you do with it?

*November* comes to us festooned with references to Orwell and Kafka (in a 1965 story by Schneider a man wakes up to find he has grown a tail). But Schneider's humane dryness and lightness is more in the manner of Graham Greene, and the only reference to Kafka in the present novel is characteristically humorous: from a French pop song, "Un, deux, trois, l'amour nest pas Kafka".

Typical of Schneider's method is the way in which the writer Joseph Roth is imported into the novel, haunting Natasha as if he were one of his All Souls' Day ghosts. Having said a quotation from Roth, Schneider makes him, through a supposed family tie with Natasha, emblematic of the odd workings of a writer's short biographical work on Roth and like him is a Jew who escaped from the Nazis to Austria and then to France. Married to a museum curator who happens to have the same name as the writer, Natasha benefits socially both from feelings of guilt towards Jews and from reverence for a notable fighter

to lay a trap for Franco and of keeping up his sexual liaison with Julia, Lippincott's mind eventually gives way to just such delusions and some majestically funny alternative versions of a party laid on by the village for his American guests. Tristram, too, has his terrors and involves a slowly staged turning of the tables on the reader's belief that Tristram is on the continent escaping from his Nazi torturers.

*The Frights* is a debut to rejoice at. Exuberant, high-spirited and deftly plotted, it is notable for its phrase: "Chelly-Chops gazed across the impressive Poshnappery of silver collars and candelabra, across the great gleaming brown Limpopo of the table, to where Grinny Sanderson sat at the end wearing terrible butter on a roll and curly Cutcombe soup." His style bears comparison with P. G. Wodehouse yet Salaman somehow stretches this comic manner to cover the deeper springs of human motivation.

against Fascism (it is assumed that she is Roth's niece). Schneider is funny and shrewd about the causes and results of such unearned increments.

Natasha feels guilt over her privileges, but continues to accept them. As a writer she is similarly inconsistent. "In love with her own infallibility", but suffering miserably from writer's block, despair over which has led her to the study of Rimbaud. Almost too tidily, she identifies with Rimbaud, seeing the fact of his having ceased to write as a reaction to the failure of the Communist revolution, a reaction equivalent to her disappointment at some of the actions of East German Communism. Tidily too, Natasha's double vision and intermittent creative paralysis echo the physical condition of her son, who has been injured in an accident, and the state of her country, afflicted by the historical accident of division. All these disparate strands are interlinked. Stefan begins to question his privileges, and to grow up, when, after his accident, he is transported to a better hospital. Natasha, even after she has courageously signed a letter protesting against the deprivation of the poet Rodakov's citizenship, does not cease to be a victim of self-doubt and depression.

The unheroic action in which Natasha's action is described will not please everyone (and did not please me) when the novel first appeared in 1979. The book, a note in the front tells us, "makes use, in very free adaptation, of certain events of recent history", an apparent reference to the loss of his West by the German poet Wolf Biermann. Schneider, however, emphasizes that *November* is a "fictional story with fictional characters", and certainly the handling of Natasha's malaise is successful precisely because we believe in her as an individual creation, conditioned by her own accidents and experiences, unique and uniquely known to around with her and her nervous reactions to quite minor incidents (a lorry at the end of the drive, a presented and underpin the novel's political preoccupations. Like her fifteen-year-old son, Natasha is growing up; but the author does not suggest that this can be an easy process. From his consciousness of restrictions of different kinds, Schneider has produced a resilient and memorable work.

Donald J. Greiner's *The Other John Updike*, published this month by the Ohio University Press, (297pp, £11.95 paperback, £4.75 paperback, 0 8214 0612 4) is a critical study of Updike's lesser known works - not the novels, but the poems, short stories, essays and play *Buchanan Dying*.

# Angels of desire

By James Kirkup

CONRAD DETREZ:  
*Le Dragueur de Dieu*  
217pp. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.

Writers in other countries seem able to reconcile sexual and religious themes in their works in a way that is rarely found in English or American authors. We find this in such widely different writers as Pasolini and Bernanos, Verlaine and Gide, García Márquez, Teilhard de Chardin and Simone Weil, as well as in some more recent works like Jean Duvieux and Petru Dumitriu's *Au Dieu Inconnu*. England would seem unable to tolerate such popularizing of religious sensuality and intellectual mysticism in works that are both satisfying as literature and revelatory as visionary parables.

Conrad Detrez is of Belgian origin and is one of the most original of the new novelists writing in French. His excellent *L'Herbe à brûler* well deserves the Prix Renaudot in 1978: it may now be found in the Livre de Poche. Detrez's unusual background lends a unique flavour to his themes and to his literary style. He studied theology as well as literature, and has lived in Brazil, Portugal and Algeria. He has written serious political studies of Brazil and Latin America, and is a brilliant translator of Jorge Amado, Antonio Callado and Dom Helder Câmara.

*Le Dragueur de Dieu* is a mixture of revolutionary Christianity and mystical homosexuality. It is beautifully written in a fluent, lucid and visionary manner, and is immensely readable tale of a modern Candide with a St John of the Cross passion for idealized sensuality in angelic form. Young Victor's angelism begins in childhood when he reads the visionary inscription in his church: "Anges, vous êtes de gloire, aimez-vous!" He is the son of

a butcher who wants him to follow his gory trade, but that is something Victor cannot face: he dedicates his adolescence to a search for divine angelic love. One day, as he is walking in a wood near his home, he is seized by a religious ecstasy that is also erotic in nature. He is swept off his feet by the Angel of Desire he has dreamed about since he was a small boy.

Victor longs to renew the experience, but it does not come again. So he leaves home and goes to Paris in a passionate quest for a renewal of this divine exaltation in the underworld of the capital. One of his ordered and often sordid homosexual boyfriends, the narrator of the self drawn into the forbidden Garden of Earthly Delights where Victor discovers that mysticism and profane love are one, though divided by an abyss into which the young men voluptuously fall in ecstasies of both physical and spiritual. They explore the strange underground of Parisian "cruising" in the parks, the Bois de Boulogne, the Gare du Nord (with its *faux pisseurs*) and other Bosch-like "gardens" of the city's dubious "delights" inhabited by passionated, falling "angels". Here we are close to the grimly gay world of Jean Genet.

They also discover a mystical-militant-homosexual-religious order, the "militants of Christ the King". Victor, like Pasolini and so many other sexual idealists seeking the ineffable in the gutter, encounters his angel, an exterminating angel. At the realization of this moving novel, we realize the full irony of its epigraph from St Matthew's Gospel: "Je vous ferai pêcheurs d'hommes".

Detrez has devised a book of unusual fascination and real originality: a thrilling picaresque novel of modern sexuality and also a cool, elegant moral cartoon. Almost incidentally, it reads like the finest novel I have read on the homosexual theme since Noël Perrin's neglected *Maria*, which appeared nearly twenty years ago.

# In deep waters

By Peter Norman

JEREMY LUCAS:  
*Whale*  
172pp. Cape, £5.50.  
0 224 01921 X

What if Melville had written the story from the point of view of Moby Dick himself, with Ahab and the rest merely bit-part players, faceless human beings who impinged now and again on his cetacean consciousness? Melville's whale becomes a character called Nightshade, Fortin and Spraylasi) but lacks both the lyrical narrative and mythic quality of *Waterproof Down*. The style is a little drab and repetitive - the Atlantic Ocean, for example, is endlessly rolling, pitching, swelling, foaming - and for a non-novel can be surprisingly novelistic: "Perhaps they would soon forget that they had once loved a young bull whale called Sabre; or perhaps . . . one chapter concludes winsomely. Somewhat irrelevant vignettes of marine life spin out the narrative; when *Shore* is off the coast of West Africa we can hear a little of the lifestyle of the kangaroo rat and other desert creatures."

The ecological message is, of course, unimpeachable; and, to be fair, when the senseless slaughter dealt out by whaling ships is described, with a fair degree of passion, the book does finally come to life. But there is something wrong with the whole conception. As a book called *Adventure Lit Thair Star*, Kenneth Allsop described, from the birds' point of view, the efforts of a bird of little ringed plovers to nest in Britain. No-one could ascribe pseudo-human emotions and behaviour to a plover; just as Allsop was able to avoid creeping anthropomorphism relatively easily, and his experiment in fictionalizing natural history proved quite successful. Whales, paradoxically, are too intelligent to be portrayed in fiction; it is perfectly possible that they develop individual relationships based on love, loyalty, enmity, etc., and perform acts of heroism and self-sacrifice, as they do in this book; but one yearns for hard scientific evidence. In its absence, one suspects that human patterns of behaviour are being grafted onto whales.

Jeremy Lucas is a scientist by trade, and has studied whales in the field. One bows, therefore, to his inerrancy; indeed, one would have welcomed more of it, for what is wrong with his book is that it lacks on the one hand the imaginative scope of a conventional novel, and on the other the kind of detailed and unclouded observation that could have been gleaned from a straightforward non-

## POETRY IN TRANSLATION

DANIEL WEISSBORT (Editor):  
Modern Poetry in Translation No. 41-42

72 pp. Modern Poetry in Translation Ltd, 46A, Woodside Park Road, London, N12 8RP. £3.  
0026 8291

ROCCO SCOTELLARO:  
*The Dawn is Always New*:  
Selected Poetry  
Translated by Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann  
202pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press, £5.55. (paperback, £3.80).  
0 691 06423 7

MARIK LUISE KASCHNITZ:  
Selected Later Poems  
Translated by Lisel Mueller  
111pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press, £5.55. (paperback, £2.75).  
0 691 06424 3

TOMAS TRANSTRÖMER:  
Selected Poems  
Translated by Robin Fulton  
162pp. Ann Arbor. Michigan: Ardis, 0 8233 462 X

Over the years there has been a shift of emphasis in that Pandora's box of a magazine *Modern Poetry in Translation*. Stress now falls more heavily on Translation than on Poetry, evidence of the magazine's success in developing interest in foreign poetries and in raising the expectations and, some would say, the status of translators. More professional translators and fewer poets are active now in what we must call the field. *MPT* 41-42 is a special issue on the art of translation. Contributors write about changes in attitude to the art and its practitioners, on translation theory, and some provide testimony about their adventures with certain poems.

The shift in *MPT* is geographical and institutional as well. Daniel Weissbort, the editor, a translator himself and a catalyst to others (poets, editors, publishers), has moved his editorial base from London to the influential Comparative Literature Department of the University of Iowa, where he is now a Professor. When he and Ted Hughes started the magazine it had no institutional affiliation; it was resolutely useful still, but in a different way. The enthusiastic poet-translator who blunders fiercely into English with his discoveries, extending his language towards the alien, is now more common now are professional linguists whose work may be accurate, may even be suggestive, but is unlikely to be valuable to poetry. Michael Hamburger, insisting that the translator must reveal the haecceity of his original, not betray it into flat translatability, is not a typical translator, though he is an excellent one. For him, the formal and thematic otherness of the text is a challenge to his own medium.

Daniel Weissbort has a marked preference for this rare sort of translator, and the most interesting articles in *MPT* 41-42 are by such people - Wilbur on Apollinaire, for example, or Hamburger on Hölderlin, talking about the practical difficulties raised by specific poems, and talking informally (Wilbur in letters to an editor, Hamburger in a kind of memoir). There is also a very unmodern translation of Etienne Dole's "The Way of Translating Well From One Language to Another" (1940): "Let all that" theoretical matters - "be debated by the best thing is to follow the common tongue." It is advice as much for poets as for translators, and Weissbort presumably prints the essay because it confirms his own instinct, whatever his fascination with theory. He is committed to translation as an essential, if by and large a secondary, form of communication. But times have changed: translation is an academic discipline, and *MPT* reflects the change. Readers may feel nostalgic for *MPT*'s early informality, the chance of discovery, those large figures such as Pope, Herbert and Pound presenting themselves suddenly and fresh.

American University Presses are producing an increasing number of

# Open to otherness

By Michael Schmidt

lack a sense of grasped present reality, of the given; she overlooks the world even as she addresses it. Her religious language often lacks spiritual consistency; she does not discover forms inhering in experience.

Certainly *Nene Gedichte* (1957) and the later work was new in its personal concern. The poet abandoned traditional forms and forged a more expressive idiom to deal with her bereavement, and that bereavement conveyed a wider sense of loss. Lisel Mueller has chosen the sharpest, most translatable poems, representing thus a part - and not the most German part - of Kaschnitz's work. Further, she has simplified syntax, making the work "seem more conventional than it is". It does seem conventional in all but its intensity. The solitary, grieving speaker desires evidence of transcendence and borrows religious and rustic terms. In the last poem in the book, "Farewell to Rome", the essential difficulty of her work becomes clear. History has not cured her of her romanticism:

How lucky they are  
Ungrateful Montale Quasimodo  
Who make their home  
At the edge of the sea  
They pick up the world  
In front of their doors  
Each day they discover eternity  
Washed up on the beach  
She does not distinguish between the

timeless particular which "each day" renders up to *coscienza*, and the *Ewigkeit*, a treacherous abstraction which loses the poet the given world and - if religious faith is tentative or absent - sets nothing in its place.

The work of the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer - fifty this year - has long been familiar to English readers, in magazines (*MPT* among them) and in a Penguin selection. Thirty-seven of the poems in this new American *Selected Poems* - translated by Tranströmer's faithful Robin Fulton - are from the Penguin.

The book is disappointing, and the quality of the translations uneven. In some poems what appears to be a literal approach has stanch the rhythm altogether. But the main problem is with the poems themselves. In an interview appended to this book, the poet discusses his 1968 poem "Night Duty". It grew directly out of six years' work with young offenders (by profession Tranströmer is a psychologist). The year is important: the tension for change was great, and for Tranströmer the recurrent imagery of pulse, footsteps, and clocks in his early work looked to be at an end. "The language marches in step with the executioners. Therefore we must get a new language." There are various difficulties here. The "we" addressed would hard-

ly understand the hermetic metaphors of the poem which are obscure in a *fin de siècle* way. The poem has lost its occasion in them. More important, this poem and its successors fail to "get a new language". They hardly even seem to try. The line was only a gesture, without consequence in or for the verse.

Tranströmer in his more recent work writes on the move, when he gets away on journeys from the fortunate constraints of home and family. He remains conscious of audience in his poems, even when he is most confident. The good "dishonest line" will be admitted for effect. There is a lack of repose, a sense that he is always busy about his poems. This is congenial and implicates us - up to a point. We remain a collective audience. He is deliberate and cosmopolitan in what has become a conventional way. The poet "with roots" looks hopelessly provincial from the airport bus; but then the tourist poet may be travelling light. It's no wonder that *Baltics* (1974), in which Tranströmer invests his own history, is the most compelling and original work in this book:

I pause with my hand on the door-handle, take the pulse of the house.  
The walls are so full of life  
The children don't dare to sleep alone in the little room upstairs - what makes me safe makes them uneasy.

# Encounters in Esperanto

By George Szirtes

OCTAVIO PAZ AND CHARLES TOMLINSON:

*Albino*  
Hijos Del Aire  
29pp. Anvil Press. £1.95.  
0 8546 072 9

EUGENIO MONTALE:  
*Xenia and Motets*  
Translated by Kate Hughes. A bilingual edition  
45pp. Agenda Editions. £3.  
0 902400 25 8

EWA LIPSKA:  
*Such Times*  
Selected Poems  
Translated by John Robert Colombo and Tarlow Iwanluk  
67pp. Toronto, Canada: Housniow Press, \$6.95.  
0 89882 054 2

FELIX STEFANILE (Translator):  
*The Blue Mountain*  
Some Italian Futurist Poets  
58pp. Carcanet New Press, £2.95.  
0 85635 355 8

The *renga* was a poetic form popular in fourteenth-century Japan. Several poets wrote successively a short stanza each to a prescribed metre. It was a polite exercise indulged in by men of a common culture and tongue; the poems were elaborate and highly congruous.

Games of course can be played seriously and the more ornate the better. In 1969 four poets of different nationalities - Charles Tomlinson, Octavio Paz, Jacques Roubaud and Edoardo Sanguineti - met to write what they claimed was the first *renga* in a most attractive way. The Western *renga*, obviously pleased with the experiment, decided to collaborate once more, in a different format, the unrhymed sonnet, this time by air-mail. They were to fix two objects of contemplation, House and Day; the first poet was to begin with a quatrain in his own language, send it to the second for him to translate and add his quatrain, then wait for that to come back before once more translating, adding three lines of his own, then the third poet, for the second to complete the sonnet. Then they would switch ends of the court, the receiver would serve, and off they went again. After three such sonnets one of the poets would write one all by himself to round

things off for the first set, and it would be turn and turn about again for the second set and match. Thus Paz writes the last sonnet for House, Tomlinson the last for Day. The result is *Albino*, the present volume. The question remains whether this has been a valuable exercise. Has the game enthralled and entertained? On balance the answer must be no; despite occasional felicities the poems are rather prolix. Why is this? Was the whole idea a mistake?

Not the game itself but the solemnity with which it is conducted seems misplaced. Both Paz and Tomlinson are fine philosophical poets and one can see why they were attracted to each other's work. But in tackling archetypal themes they have committed themselves to a kind of poetic Esperanto. All the skill in the world cannot save aridities like

House that memory makes out of itself  
between the spaces of blank time -  
more thought  
than lived and yet more said than thought  
house that lasts as long as its own sound takes . . .

Such lines remind one of some discursive passages in *The Four Quartets*, without the lyrical intensity. The rules are against them too. The poets cannot allow too much of a specific nature to creep in, since they give themselves no room to develop potentially fruitful images. To revert to the tennis metaphor: it is like watching a purely baseline game. Perhaps, as Anthony Thwaite once suggested, the *renga* was a social rather than a literary phenomenon.

Perhaps, also, with a bit more latitude Paz or Tomlinson might have found other more striking images for the translatability of the familiar world, something like "And life that seemed vast / is briefer than your handkerchief." It would have been worth looking for. The immediacy and allusiveness of this line and a half from the "Motets" of Eugenio Montale makes the Paz-Tomlinson house that lasts as long as its own sound takes appear too cerebral. But then Montale was a wonderful poet. The new translations of the *Motets* of 1939 and the *Xenia* sequences of the 1960s by Kate Hughes are therefore doubly welcome for they present these major cycles of love poems completely and in a bilingual edition. The *Motets* celebrate an unnamed woman. They contain memories of war and institutions, and fragments of intense, intimate landscapes which give the verse its brightness and bitterness; but we are never made to feel that the land-

We devised a whistle  
as a signal of recognition in the afterlife.  
I am trying it out now in the hope  
we're all dead already and don't know it.

Ewa Lipska is still in her thirties and enjoys a considerable reputation in Poland. Her selected poems, *Such Times*, show a surprising lightness of wit. Her fantasy often indulges itself in an ironic or sinister games-playing; it is in fact gallows-humour of a particularly delicate sort. Her constructions employ logic and anti-logic in a most attractive way. She ought to gain readers in the West, and the current Canadian volume is a start.

*The Blue Mountain*, on the other hand, begins with an apology from the translator in prose style that would do credit to Murphy A. Sweat, the zappy Yale professor in Frederick Crews's *The Pooh Perplex*: "Well, imagine D'Annunzio - a Big Finger in Givoni's day - trying to say the same thing, or some of our own college poets today." The poems, he admits, are not up to much; in fact he cuts off the last five or six lines of Marinetti's only poem in the book. Paolo Buzzi has some nice phrases but the general tone is summed up in Palazzeschi's rhetorical question: "Who am I? Am I a poet?" to which he correctly answers, "No, for sure."

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